The "Great Teaching of Yoga," the Chinese Appropriation of the Tantras, and the Question of Esoteric Buddhism

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Introduction

What became of the texts called Tantras when they were imported to China? Despite a wealth of historical evidence, this apparently simple question is remarkably difficult to answer, not the least because the transmission of the Tantras involved a complex process of translation and appropriation—both literally and figuratively. Asian and Western scholars alike have identified an "Esoteric" or "Tantric" school that briefly flourished during the eighth century in China. In the common historical narrative this school was founded by three teachers, Śubhākara-siṃha[1] 善無畏 (Shanwuwei, 637-735), Vajrabodhi 金剛智 (Jin'gangzhi, 671-741), and Amoghavajra 不空金剛 (Bukong jin'gang, 705-774), and it was Amoghavajra's disciple Huiguo 惠果 (746-805) who passed these teachings on to the Japanese pilgrim Kūkai 空海 (779-835), who then returned to Japan in 805 to establish Shingon 眞言.[2] A few decades after Kūkai's departure from China the school apparently vanished.[3]

A number of scholars have commented on this essay and their suggestions have been very helpful in improving it. I wish to express my gratitude to Ronald Davidson, Robert Sharf, John McRae, Richard D. McBride, II, Henrik H. Sørensen, James Andersen, and to the anonymous reviewers, as well as to the National Endowment for the Humanities for funding that provided time off from teaching to carry out a part of this project.

[1] A survey of recent scholarly publications finds this name rendered variously as Śubhākarasiṃha, Śubhakarasiṃha, and Śubhākara-siṃha. Willemen, made a convincing case some twenty-five years ago in "Tripitaka Shan-wu-wei's Name" that the proper rendering of Shanwuwei's name should be Śubhākara(siṃha). Preferring to avoid a parentheses in a name I opt for Śubhākara-siṃha in this article.

[2] For the biographies of the three teachers see Chou I-liang [Zhou Yiliang], "Tantrism in China," (1945): 241-332. It has recently been reprinted in Payne, ed., *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia* (2006), 33-60, minus its detailed appendices.

[3] Indeed, a look at the Chinese lines of the complex transmission lineages contained in *Mikkyō daijiten*, volume six (1-30) show them petering out a generation or so after Kūkai.

Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), the great Northern Song exegete and monastic leader gives a different account in his *Lives of Eminent Monks Composed in the Song* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳):

> Among those who transmitted the Wheel of Instruction and Command (*jiaoling lun* 教令輪)[4] in China, Vajrabodhi is regarded as the first patriarch (*shizu* 始祖) Amoghavajra the second (*erzu* 二祖), and Huilang 慧朗 (d. circa 778) the third (*sanzu* 三祖). From him on the succession of patriarchs (*zongcheng* 宗承) is [well] known. Thereafter the lineage divided into many sects (*chi fen paibie* 岐分派別) and [they] all claim to teach the Great Teaching of Yoga (*yuqie dajiao* 瑜伽大教). Though they are many in number, I wonder why so little effect has been shown. [This] can be compared to [the myth] that Yujia produced Yinglong, Yinglong in its turn produced the phoenix. From the phoenix onward only common birds are produced. Would that there were no change.[5]

Zanning's amusing account does not mention Śubhākara-siṃha; it names Huilang as successor to Amoghavajra rather than Huiguo; it identifies the tradition as the "Wheel of Instruction and Command" and the "Great Teaching of Yoga"; and it claims the widely known existence of multiple lineages or sects at the end of the tenth century.

It seems hard to reconcile Zanning's history with modern accounts. What was this "Great Teaching of Yoga" identified by Zanning? When were its genealogical claims formulated? Who formulated them? Who circulated them? What was the basis for Zanning's statement? Is there any evidence that Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, Huilang, or any of their disciples regarded their teaching as distinct from the Mahāyāna, and if so, how? Why is there no mention in Zanning's account of "Esoteric Buddhism" (*mijiao* 密教) or an "Esoteric school" (*mizong* 密宗), let alone "Tantra"?

What we do know is that in the course of the eighth century new Buddhist texts composed as little as fifty years earlier in South Asia, many containing the term tantra in their titles, were carried across Asia and quickly translated. In China hundreds of "Esoteric" texts (Esoteric is the term most frequently used by modern scholars to describe Tantras in East Asia) were translated and circulated under imperial auspices between 715-800 and 980-1078, and thousands of sculptures, temples, and grottos were constructed. This boom in religious construction lasted through the Southern Song and includes some of the most magnificent Buddhist sculpture ever produced.[6] Yet in the common narrative by the middle of the ninth

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[4] Since at least Chou I-liang the term *jiaoling lun* has been translated in English as "Wheel of Teaching and Command" or "Wheel of Instruction and Command." Although awkward there are good reasons for this translation. I will examine them later in this article.

[5] T 2061: 50.714a15-18. I generally follow Chou I-liang's translation here but have made minor modifications, some to adhere more closely to the text. For instance, Chou adds [The development of this school] after "shown." I have added the Chinese and shifted romanization into the standard pinyin. Chou, *Tantrism in China*, 306-307.

[6] Much of the sculpture in southwest China executed during the Song includes Esoteric deities such

century the Tantras had no discernable impact on China.

Given Shingon's long and continued presence in Japan as well as the success of the Vajrayāna in Tibet and Central Asia, scholars have been puzzled by the "failure" of "Tantric" or "Esoteric" Buddhism in China. Some have argued that the Esoteric school was so court-centered that it suffered a fatal blow during the Huichang persecution of Buddhism in 845. Some have concluded that esoteric teachings offended Chinese sensibilities and therefore never really set down deep roots beyond the court. Others have argued that resurgent interest in Confucian teachings in the late Tang and Song eclipsed a Buddhism already in decline.[7] The line of questioning reminds me of Max Weber's approach to China and the search for reasons for the "failure" of capitalism to emerge there—it begs the question, especially in the face of imperially sponsored translation activities well into the eleventh century and indications from Zanning of considerable numbers of proponents of the "Great Teaching of Yoga."[8]

This essay will address recent work on the role of the Tantras in China. I argue—along with recent critics—that our approach to understanding the processes and historical circumstances of the translation, circulation, and appropriation in China of the Tantras has been distorted by assumptions based on later Japanese and Tibetan sectarianism. Having assumed that institutionalized schools were the natural form of religion, scholars posit that if no Esoteric "school" can be found or was sustained, there can have been no interest in the texts, deities, or rituals in question. A new historiographical paradigm emerging in the last two decades has shown that these assumptions have skewed our understanding of East Asian religion and have rendered a flourishing interest in esoteric texts, practices and images from the Tang onwards all but invisible.[9] Indeed, the texts called Tantras and many of the deities and rituals in them, found wide and often enthusiastic dissemination in China.[10]

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as the *vidyārājas*. For an overview in English see Howard, *Summit of Treasures*. For an entré into Chinese discussions of the Esoteric dimensions of Baoding shan 寶頂山 see Gao, *Dazu shike yanjiu*, 45-82, Chen, *Dazu shikekaogu yu yanjiu*, 205-236, and Chen, *Dazu shike kaocha yu yanjiu*, 181-224.

[7] An otherwise superb article by Jan Yun-hua [Ran Yunhua], "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China" makes such arguments. See especially 139-144. Recent work by Huang Chi-chiang [Huang Jijiang] and Tansen Sen have presented a more nuanced picture, but still describe things in terms of "failure" rather than impact. See Huang, "Imperial Rulership and Buddhism in the Early Northern Sung," 144-187; and Sen, "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 27-80. I take up the issue of the Song translators, their work, and modern perceptions of it elsewhere.

[8] Weber, *The Religion of China*, especially his "Conclusions: Confucianism and Puritanism," 226-249.

[9] Stanley Weinstein provides a tight discussion of the problem of rendering the Chinese term *zong* 宗 as "school" as well as the dubious status of the Esoteric teaching as a school in his entry for "Chinese Buddhism" under the topic of "Buddhism: Schools of" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2: 482-487. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this article out to me. Other writers critiquing the received view include Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, and his posthumous *Chinese Magical Medicine*; Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*; and Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*.

[10] The work of the late Michel Strickmann has done much to bring to light the impact of Esoteric Buddhism in China. See especially his *Mantras et mandarins* and my review in *Journal of Chinese*

This article reconsiders recent scholarly appraisals in light of historical evidence concerning Esoteric Buddhism in the eighth century, and in light of Zanning's characterization of Esoteric Buddhism in the tenth century. But before turning to the mid-Tang it is important to consider some basic methodological issues that have dogged the study of Esoteric Buddhism and Tantra more broadly.

Which Context? Thinking About History and Language

Among the most difficult issues with regard to our understanding of the circulation and appropriation of the Tantras, as well as other late Mahāyāna literature in China, is that of the unacknowledged agendas we bring to the task. Not all that long ago many scholars of religion agreed with the proposition that primitive humans worshiped a "High God" and only gradually fell into polytheism and animism. The late nineteenth-century discovery of a hymn to the hitherto esoteric or "unknown" Maori god Io seemed to affirm this thesis, and it was widely cited by Eliade and others as a kind of proof text for *Urmonotheismus*.[11] Jonathan Z. Smith's "The Unknown God: Myth in History" applied careful historical sleuthing and a healthy dash of suspicion to demonstrate that the text was almost certainly a recent post-European creation, and that the hitherto unknown god Io was a creative response to rapidly changing social and religious conditions initiated by Christian missionaries and native responses to them.[12] In other words, its proper historical context was not archaic, but modern. My brief summary does not do justice to Smith's sophisticated historical detective work, but it does help to make one point: Context is everything, and what Smith dubbed the "pre-interpretive decisions and operations" by which we choose a context for reading our data make all the difference in the world.[13] We might wish to think that advances in historical and critical scholarship have rendered such mistakes unlikely—but new theories will no doubt breed new orthodoxies and new errors as well as new insights.

Context can take a variety of forms, not all of them immediately obvious as choices. Whatever else may be the case if we are historians, the taxonomies of later historical periods should not be applied to earlier phenomena without notice and explanation. Further, the taxonomies and hermeneutics of those we study (and their doctrinal, social, and ritual evolution) should not be conflated with our own taxonomies and hermeneutics.[14] For instance, some treatments of Esoteric Buddhism in China persist in applying the late Japanese Shingon hermeneutic distinguishing "pure" (*seijun mikkyō* 正純密教 or *junmitsu* 純密) from "miscellaneous" Esoterism (*zōbu mikkyō* 雜部密教 or *zōmitsu* 雜密) without mention of its

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Religions.

[11] For instance, see Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 24, 82-83.

[12] Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Unknown God: Myth in History," 88.

[13] Smith, "The Unknown God: Myth in History," 67.

[14] An extremely useful and clear-headed summary of these issues with regard to the problem of tantra has been provided by Payne in his "Introduction" to the volume *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia.* See especially 1-27.

provenance.[15] So too, treatments of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet, Central Asia, China, and Japan often use the rather late four-fold taxonomy of Tantra on earlier materials without mention of the historical provenance and development of such taxonomies.[16] Both Matthew Kapstein and Jacob Dalton have discussed the development of Indian and Tibetan classificatory systems, and Dalton has argued that the "standard" taxonomy of Kriyā, Caryā, Yoga, and Anuttarayoga Tantras is likely a product of twelfth-century Tibet.[17] As such, its application to developments in eighth- through eleventh-century China is anachronistic. Indeed, choosing to identify certain mid-Tang Buddhist texts, practices, and social groupings as "Esoteric Buddhism" involves a certain amount of anachronism. In the course of this essay I will make the deficiencies and utility of the term Esoteric Buddhism clear.

Contextual assumptions embedded in language often go unnoticed, and for this reason I examine below the history of the English term "esoteric" to make clear its curious genealogy. Any approach to the past must negotiate the slippage between past and present taxonomies. Just as good history should not ignore native terminology, so too it cannot ignore analytically valuable contributions of the present or the weight of common usage. Were we only to discuss phenomena in the language of the time or in terms that have indisputable equivalents in modern parlance (this is never the case) our investigations would be limited to listing native terms and categories and spurning all analysis. Although it is tempting to fall back on description, vocabulary, and taxonomies found only in the historical data, such an approach is naïve. As T. Griffith Foulk points out regarding the analysis of Chinese Buddhist lineages:

> It is sometimes objected that historians, especially intellectual or religious historians, should not impose their own categories on the foreign cultures they study…. However, when it comes time to explain and interpret what one has learned using one's own language and operating within the constraints of one's own academic discipline, it is manifestly impossible to use only concepts borrowed from the foreign tradition that is the object of study. In plain English, it is absurd to argue that because medieval Chinese Buddhists never drew a distinction between lineages as semi-mythological entities and schools as historical ones we should refrain from imposing that distinction on them.[18]

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[15] The terms do not appear as paired doctrinal or textual classifiers in the Chinese canon and may be as late as the Edo period. For an analysis see Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 152-154. A good example of such discussions is available in English in Kiyota's *Shingon Buddhism*, 5-17, where the "pure" category is aligned with Mahāyāna doctrinal literature while the "miscellaneous" elements are aligned with "popular beliefs."

[16] There has been improvement here. For instance, the historical emergence of the categories of Tantra is recounted in the fifth edition of the widely used text *Buddhist Religions:A Historical Introduction* by Robinson, Johnson, and Thanissaro, 130-132. This is a vast improvement over the treatment in the fourth edition by Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, 123-130.

[17] See Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 15-17, and Dalton, "A Crisis of Doxology," especially 118, 152-161.

[18] Foulk, T. Griffith, "The Ch'an *Tsung* in Medieval China," 20.

Indeed, as numerous recent theorists have pointed out, the creation and application of new vocabulary makes possible new insights.[19] As we examine the translation, circulation, and appropriation of Tantras in China we must try to see things in terms that the participants "on the ground" would have found comprehensible. At the same time our analysis must be cast in terms that are meaningful in contemporary scholarly discourse while they avoid being misleading.

The trickiest context to deal with is often our own. Our access to data not available to those whom we study can lead to unexamined "preinterpretive decisions." For instance, as most Chinese Buddhists never learned Sanskrit, what lay behind the Chinese translations and their social and doctrinal circumstances in South Asia was obscure and therefore a matter open to projection. Buddhism appeared in Chinese dress, using Chinese vocabulary. Modern Buddhology, by privileging Sanskrit and Pali, tends to misrepresent regional forms of Buddhism in favor of a unified vision of Buddhism.[20] This is not to say that there is no relationship between South Asian and East or Central Asian Buddhisms. Certainly these Buddhists saw their Buddhism as a true expression of the "original" South Asian teacher. We simply need to take care that our "comprehensive" and Indo-centric vision of Buddhism does not make us lose sight of how and why local Buddhisms developed as they did.[21] Indeed our research must take account of the local social realities in a careful manner. Thus, those closest to South Asian teachers and translators were in some ways closest to South Asian Buddhisms. It is not only modern scholars who are aware of this. Zanning, whose thoughts on Esoteric Buddhism I examine below, had a very sophisticated understanding of the linguistic and cultural pitfalls involved in the translation of Buddhist texts between South and East Asia. The more removed one is from the setting of translation, the more local social realities and ideological systems dominate things. To deny such considerations would be, on the one hand, to obscure a remarkable pan-Asian phenomenon and, on the other, to obscure its local realities.[22]

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[19] Catherine Belsey, has an excellent discussion of what is at stake in the use of new terms in *Critical Practice*, second ed., 2-6, 35-51.

[20] The standard metaphor behind this is the "tree" with its seed, roots, trunk, and branches—not coincidentally a linguistic and diffusionary tree.

[21] Despite the world-wide dissemination of Buddhism, we tend to see it as an Indian religion because that is where it originated. But for all intents and purposes it ceased to exist in India after the fourteenth century.

[22] Our "comprehensive" view of things is also *historically situated and limited*, often in surprising ways. For instance, contemporary academic and national boundaries condition the production of knowledge. Only recently have scholars of Chinese Buddhism recognized that developments on the Korean peninsula can shed light on developments in "China." But still, very few scholars work on Vajrayāna Buddhism after the Mongol conquest. The Mongols, and later the Manchus richly supported and patronized the Vajrayāna, and it is central to understanding not only the religion but also the politics of late imperial China. But the academic study of Buddhism has apportioned the Vajrayāna to South and Central Asia. Modern national boundaries also condition scholarship in odd ways. Research on Chinese Buddhism, particularly on Esoteric Buddhism, has been hobbled by an inexplicable reticence with regard to developments in Tibet, India, Nanzhao, or even of Liao, Xixia, or Korean Esoteric Buddhism.

The Problem of "Schools" or "Sects"

The construction, promulgation, and political and religious utility of such categories as "Tantric, "esoteric" versus "exoteric," "school" or "sect" and so on is not merely the purview of scholars—*it is part of the fabric of historical and religious developments throughout history*. Indeed, if we examine any of the major "sectarian" labels—Mahāyāna, Hīnayāna, Theravada—we find that each is the vehicle for polemical definition and redefinition.[23] Perhaps the most astute recent demonstration of this is Ryūichi Abé's discussion of Kūkai's promotion of the "Esoteric" teachings he acquired in China. Abé demonstrates that Kūkai had to walk a fine line in order to convince the established Nara clerical elite that his new taxonomy that distinguished "Esoteric" from "Exoteric" teachings was simultaneously superior to older hermeneutics *and already present* in the very structure of the Mahāyāna. Kūkai was able to demonstrate that his new ritual and linguistic technology provided the key for the established Nara schools to understand the *dhāraṇīs* and mantras that appeared in their own texts.[24]

Behind all of this is the common, human penchant for seeing things in terms of clear-cut binaries. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholars tended to see religion through the lens of the binary opposition of Religion or syncretism.[25] Sects, schools, or religions were characterized by exclusive membership and were thought to represent natural and pure categories. All else was a blend or hybrid (but without the cachet accorded the category in recent theory). The metaphorical basis of such taxonomies is one of purity versus pollution and miscegenation, and it should be understood in light of contemporary racial theories as well as the history and development of religious taxonomies.

The generations of European and American scholars of East Asian religions beginning with the Jesuit missionaries tried to view their new data in familiar categories. Further, the researchers of a century ago quickly realized two interesting things. First, the prodigious scholarship of the Japanese on China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and India was often premised on a similar taxonomy of "school" or "sect." Second, on-the-ground religion in China and Japan did not always seem to fit into this procrustean bed. Certainly there were "schools" of Buddhism in China (*pai* 派, *zong* 宗), but the overwhelming evidence was that few were exclusive and even fewer had the institutional or social support to enforce exclusivity. Indeed,

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All of these developed in what is arguably a single world system on the Asian continent, a world system in which China was not always the dominant player and for which China's contemporary boundaries are meaningless or worse, misleading.

[23] See Richard S. Cohen, "Discontented Categories: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in Indian Buddhist History," 1-25.

[24] Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 269-270.

[25] On the issue of religion and syncretism see Colpe, "Syncretism," 218b-227b. For a trenchant critique of the deficiencies of the category syncretism see the entry on "Syncretism" written by Ernst and Stewart, in *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia,* 586-588.

as Stanley Weinstein and others have pointed out, the Chinese term *zong* in its strong sense indicates a lineage with a founding ancestor and series of patriarchs, while in its weaker sense can simply mean a common doctrinal theme or position. Thus, many of the reputed "schools" functioned more like study groups or perhaps even cliques, especially before the Song dynasty.[26] Throughout much of Chinese history and, certainly throughout the period of the Tang and Song I am examining here, most monasteries housed monks of all persuasions under a common discipline. Indeed, the signal institutional development during the period is not a change in this state of affairs, but rather a change whereby the government reserved *the abbacies* of monasteries for recognized leaders of Chan, Vinaya (Lü 律), or Tiantai, lineages. [27] The growing importance of lineages and their connection to monastic administration and patronage has only recently been recognized.

Perhaps some of the confusion has been generated by a failure properly to understand the historical realities governing which religious behaviors are subject to institutional sanction or support and which are not. To return to the example of Kūkai, it now seems clear that Kūkai was intent on introducing "a new type of religious discourse grounded in his analysis of the ritual language of mantra."[28] He was not trying to create an exclusive institution outside of the Nara clerical establishment. Later followers set about the task of expanding institutional support and recasting the great master as a founder.

The Trouble with Tantra

Zanning, in the passage quoted above, tells of the lineage of the "Great Teaching of Yoga" and its "division into many sects" (*chi fen paibie*). Modern scholars refer loosely to the Tang teachers mentioned by Zanning as representatives of a tradition of Esoteric or Tantric Buddhism. Which label we employ—Esoteric, Tantric, Yoga—is of more than nominalistic concern and calls for reflection and precision. Some have argued that "Esoteric Buddhism" is more appropriate to East Asian phenomena, if only because it corresponds to an indigenous term, *mijiao* (密教, Japanese *mikkyō*). I will examine this below, and set out my conclusions concerning the use of the term Esoteric Buddhism at the end of the essay. A search of the Buddhist reference works *Bukkyō daijiten* and *Mikkyō daijiten* turns up *no transliterated form of the term tantra until the modern period*. Indeed, as Lü Jianfu has noted, the transliterated term "Tantra" occurs just once in the canon.[29] This is quite striking as Chinese transliterations and translations of most of the vocabulary of the Buddhist Tantras, including *dhāraṇī*, *homa*,

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[26] See Weinstein, "Chinese Buddhism," 484-485 and Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," 163-167.

[27] T. Griffith Foulk, "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an," 223.

[28] Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 4.

[29] Lü, *Zhongguo mijiao shi*, 15. *Tandaluo* 壇怛囉 occurs in the *Ruixiye jing* 蕤呬耶經 T 897, at line 770b5. The text is attributed to Amoghavajra and is also known as the *Yuxiye jing* 玉呬耶經 and the *Juxitandaluo jing* 瞿醯壇怛囉 or *Guhyatantra*. This is born out by a comprehensive search of the canon.

abhiṣeka, *āveśa*, etc., are well attested. What this implies is not that these texts or the practices detailed in them were inconsequential. To the contrary, their importation and circulation was part of a pan-Asian phenomenon linked with trade, warfare, and missionary activity. But the Chinese propagation and assimilation of what we now generally call "Tantric" texts went forward without the term "Tantra" proper. Chinese translators persistently rendered the *Mahātantrarāja* or *Mahākalparāja* of these titles with the phrase *Da jiaowang* 大教王 or "Great King of the Teaching." Whether this means Chinese perceived of some or all of these texts as qualitatively different from previous Buddhist teachings is a matter I will take up below.

Perhaps the two most significant and widely influential attempts to use the term Tantra with some precision in the East Asian sphere were by Tsuda Shin'ichi and Michel Strickmann. Tsuda posited a "critical" disjunction between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Tantrism, with the former culminating in the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra* and the latter commencing with the *Vajraśekhara-sarvatathāgata-satya-saṃgraha-mahāyāna-pratyutpannābhisambuddha-mahātantrarāja-sūtra* (hereafter, STTS).[30] For Tsuda, the crucial tantric distinction is the assertion of identity between the practitioner and the deity which emerges in the STTS. Tsuda continued his argument in the seldom cited "Vajrayoṣidbhageṣu Vijahara" which attempts to trace the development of Tantra from the STTS to the *Hevajra Tantra*.[31] Michel Strickmann's *Mantras et mandarins* makes a similar distinction, arguing that "l'art tantrique *est* le rituel tantrique" and that "le rituel du bouddhisme tantrique est l'union avec une icône."[32] Strickmann's sweeping work attempts to make sense of a huge range of medieval religious phenomena, from possession, to Buddhist use of *dhāraṇī*, to Daoist rites for the dead ("taoisme tantrique").[33] Both scholars propose a monothetic definition of tantrism focused on the process of ritual identification (Sanskrit *ahaṃkāra*). In the strictest terms, a tradition that does not involve such identification is not Tantric. The disadvantage of such a definition is that it often excludes things we might want included. Thus, the avowedly tantric Śaiva Siddhānta tradition which does not include ritual identification would be classified as non-tantric. On the other hand, Strickmann, by casting such a broad net and introducing the term "prototantrisme," loses the advantage of definitional precision.[34]

Despite our best efforts the problem of defining Tantrism is unlikely to disappear. As André Padoux noted, there is no word in Sanskrit for Tantrism, and Herbert Guenther characterized it as "one of the haziest notions and misconceptions the Western mind has

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[30] Tsuda, "A Critical Tantrism," 167-231. Śubhākara-siṃha produced a translation of the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra* T 848 with the help of the monk Yixing 一行. Partial renderings of the STTS were produced by Vajrabodhi (T 866) and Amoghavajra (T 865), and a full translation was produced by Dānapāla 施護 during the Song (T 882).

[31] Tsuda, "Vajrayoṣidbhageṣu Vijahara," 596-616.

[32] Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, 203.

[33] Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, 55.

[34] Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, 48, 53, 72-79, and *passim*. For a critique see McBride, "Dhāraṇī and Spells in Medieval Sinitic Buddhism," 95-96, note 33.

evolved."[35] The issue of "Tantrism" (as opposed to texts labeled Tantras) has been perceptively addressed by Hugh Urban. Urban argues that *Tantrism* comes into being as an imagined category (like the category Hinduism), a category produced in the dialectical encounter between Indians and Europeans.[36] Urban does not argue that there were no Tantras before the colonial period—there obviously were. Urban does not say, as some have implied, that there are no premodern discourses concerning Tantra. In his brief examination of Abhinavagupta (ca. 950-1050), author of *Tantrāloka* and *Tantrasāra*, he points out that Abhinavagupta does not present Tantra as the sort of "singular, comprehensive category that embraces most of the traditions that we now identify by the term."[37] Indeed, many of the texts widely reckoned to be tantras, like the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṁgīti,* do not even have the term in their titles. What Urban warns of is the all too easy elision of modern discourses with a variety of premodern discourses involving the word Tantra.[38] Nor does Urban argue that scholars should not attempt to use the term Tantra as an analytical category in the study of pre-colonial texts, rituals, and social movements. What he demonstrates is that some scholars have tended to accept uncritically the recent construct "Tantrism" and project it onto a variety of texts from widely ranging periods in South Asian history anachronistically to create a "Tantric tradition" with Hindu and Buddhist variants.[39]

Urban's approach to the problem is straightforward: by recognizing the imagined and dialectical nature of the category "Tantrism" and the concrete historical, economic, and political forces which have produced it we may then "*reimagine* this category in new and more useful ways."[40] As a first step in reclaiming the term Tantra as an analytical tool, Urban suggests that scholars use the term with reference to precise and concrete texts, contexts and

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[35] Padoux, "Tantrism," 14: 273. Geunther's comment is from *The Life and Teaching of Naropa* (1971), 112.

[36] Urban, *Tantra*, 27. For Urban, "Tantra is a … product of the mirroring and misrepresentation at work between both East and West. It is a dialectical category—similar to what Walter Benjamin has called a *dialectical image*—born out of the mirroring and mimesis that goes on between Western and Indian minds. Neither simply the result of an indigenous evolution nor a mere Orientalist fabrication, Tantra is a shifting amalgam of fantasies, fears, and wish fulfillments, at once native and Other" (3). "Categories like Tantra are never *simply* the creation of Western scholarly imagination; they are far more complex, joint creations, the ambiguous result of the representation and counter-representation at work between Indian and Western imaginations, reflecting the interests both of practitioners and interpreters" (272).

[37] Urban, *Tantra*, 34.

[38] An example relevant to my discussion of "The Great Teaching of Yoga" below is Buddhaguhya's discourse on the types of Tantra in his late eighth-century commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-vikurvati-adhiṣṭhāna-tantra* (preserved in Tibetan). For a translation see Hodge, *The Mahāvairocana-abhisaṃbodhi Tantra with Buddhaguhya's Commentary*, especially 43-46.

[39] Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, "les agama du śivaïsme médiéval et les tantra du bouddhisme médiéval représentent simplement différentes versions, différentes rédactions d'une seule et même chose," 24. Despite Urban I do see some logic in Strickmann's statement.

[40] Urban, Tantra, 280.

situations.[41] It is no accident that recent scholarly treatments have focused on the characteristics of Tantra, Vajrayāna, or Mantrayāna in specific texts and historical circumstances. Used in conjunction with carefully applied polythetic definitions of Tantra such as those recently proposed by Douglas R. Brooks or David G. White, such attention to historical particulars can help offset previous problems. But we should not lose sight of the fact that while such definitions can have considerable analytical utility, and while they intersect with and overlap indigenous taxonomies, *they are nonetheless modern constructs*.[42]

Recent history renders the scholarly use of the terms "Tantric" or "tantrism" suspect. However, the term Tantra has been a part of premodern discourses in South Asia and Tibet and can be of use in situating specific texts and practices in a *continental* context, as for example, when we want to discuss how Tibetans appropriated the STTS as opposed to how the Chinese appropriated it.[43]

Questioning Esoteric Buddhism

The most widely used among the variety of terms replacing the term "Tantric" Buddhism is the word "Esoteric." The word stems from the Greek ἐσωτερικός and has a meaning of what is interior and therefore out of sight or hidden. Its first use is by Lucian who tells us that Aristotle drew a distinction between his "esoteric" and "exoteric" works.[44] Thus it would seem a convenient translation for any term indicative of specialized knowledge, ritual or otherwise, especially when such knowledge appears in a contrastive or binary pairing. Surprisingly the term appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* but does not take us to an Asian source. Rather, "Esoteric Buddhism" was first used to refer to *theosophical* doctrines passed down among supposedly initiated Buddhist masters, a theory put forward by the Theosophist A. P. Sinnett in his *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883). It is also found in the late-nineteenth century writings of other Theosophists, notably H. P. Blavatsky.[45] The term also appears in a pamphlet titled "Esoteric Buddhism" by Rev. W.E. Parson for the Council of the United Missions in Japan, 1886. About the same time Edward Heneage Dering wrote two articles in "The Month" which were reprinted as *Esoteric Buddhism: The New Gospel of Atheism*, by Washbourne (1887). From there it apparently made its way into the late essays of

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[41] Urban, *Tantra*, 273-274.

[42] For a discussion of polythetic approaches see Payne, *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, pp. 10-11. For White's thoughtful attempt to "map" Tantra see *Tantra in Practice*, 3-36. See also Urban's evaluation of such approaches, *Tantra*, 271-273.

[43] The title of the STTS demonstrates the difficulties of the situation. The earliest versions of the text exist in Chinese, and *Bukkyō daijiten* gives the end of the reconstructed Sanskrit title as *mahātantra-rājā-sūtra*, while an extant tenth century Sanskrit manuscript gives the title as *mahākalpa-rājā.* Regardless of which word appears in the title Buddhaguhya clearly classifies it as Yoga Tantra. See Snellgrove's introduction to Lokesh Chandra and Snellgrove, *Sarva-Tathāgatha-Tattva-Saṅgraha*, 5-67.

[44] See *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for "Esoteric."

[45] Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* was first published in Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1883.

Max Müller (1901) and thence into the broader public consciousness. This decidedly quirky and colonialist genealogy is cause for caution in adopting the term "Esoteric Buddhism," though it appears that its origins have been largely forgotten.

It would be natural for one to assume that scholars who use the term Esoteric Buddhism today have specific phenomena in mind—phenomena on the order of a religious tradition or traditions derived from South Asian Buddhist Tantras, with a lineage of translators, teachers and ritual practices including a restricted transmission requiring initiation by an *ācārya*. While this is now more frequently the case, the definition of the term is still somewhat fuzzy, with some scholars treating all mantras and *dhāraṇīs* as "Esoteric" or "proto-Esoteric" and drawing no clear distinctions between the Mahāyāna and Esoteric Buddhism, as though the appearance of mantras in a text automatically verifies its status as "Esoteric."[46]

The best scholarship in the last decade has been pressing for historical precision in these matters. Ronald Davidson, for instance, has advanced an implacably historical definition of Esoteric Buddhism, one that rejects attempts to introduce quasi-historical or hypothetical pictures of "proto" Esoteric Buddhism.[47] Davidson argues that although it builds on pre-existing elements of Buddhist tradition, Esoteric Buddhism nonetheless appears rapidly during the latter half of the seventh century. Reflecting the world of medieval sāmanta feudalism, the new Esoteric texts and the mandalas in them transposed the notion of the ruler as the *rājādhirāja* (supreme overlord) to the realm of religious ritual. Thus, for Davidson "the Mantrayāna is simultaneously the most politically involved of Buddhist forms and the variety of Buddhism most acculturated to the medieval Indian landscape."[48] Esoteric Buddhism touted itself as "the way of secret mantras (*guhyamantrayāna*)" "analogous to the Mahāyāna's self-description as the way of the bodhisattva (*bodhisattvayāna*)," "it insisted on an immutable master-disciple bond, employed royal acts of consecration, and used elaborate mandalas in which the meditator was to envision himself as the Buddha in a field of subordinate Buddhas." New scriptures were rapidly composed and "they developed rituals (particularly fire sacrifice) for the purpose of a codified series of soteriological and nonsoteriological acts and ultimately institutionalized this material in Buddhist monasteries."[49] Although previous forms of Buddhism had cults of protector deities, a prominent feature of these texts is the central role of fierce manifestations of the bodhisattvas—the *vidyārājas*—and their aid in reaching mundane objectives.[50] This view

[46] See McBride, "Dhāraṇī and Spells in Medieval Sinitic Buddhism," for an analysis of the situation.

[47] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 117, 124, 145. This is not to say that there is no value in studying those dimensions of Mahāyāna Buddhism that led to the emergence of the medieval Esoteric texts. Rather, what it does is to make firm an analytical distinction. For an intriguing thesis on one possible pre-Vajrayāna development see Kapstein's discussion of "scholastic *mantrayāna*" and "Vajrayāna scholasticism" in his *Reason's Traces*, 233-255.

[48] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 114. Chapter four discusses the concept of *rājādhirāja*.

[49] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 117.

[50] The classic treatment of the *vidyārājas* is Przyluski, "Les Vidyārāja," 301-318. See also the entry in *Bukkyō daijiten* 4779a-c, and Duquenne, "Daitoku myōō," *Hôbôgirin* VI: 652-670. A recent work by Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion,* argues that the growing prominence of the *vidyārājas* is one of the earmarks of Esoteric Buddhism. See especially his discussion on 3-30.

confines Esoteric Buddhism to the seventh century and later and distinguishes it from the generalized use of spells and mantras that have characterized Buddhism and, for that matter, South Asian religions of all stripes.[51]

The sinitic term *mijiao* 密教 that seems the most obvious item in the East Asian lexicon corresponding to the English locution "Esoteric Buddhism" is itself a term of ideological contestation. Shingon scholars have been at pains to distinguish their "pure" esoteric tradition (*junmitsu* 純密) both from earlier "unsystematic" esoterism (*zōmitsu* 雑密, literally "miscellaneous esoterism") and from supposedly "hybrid" forms based on the later Tantras (i.e. the Yoginī-tantras) which they define as corrupted by the influences of Śaivaite Tantra. There are now a number of critiques that underscore the recent origin and sectarian nature of this taxonomy and its consequent unsuitability to critical historical scholarship.[52]

The question of the historical underpinnings of the term *mijiao* and when the term began to be used in something like the sense used currently to designate religious traditions in East Asia derived or adapted from South Asian Tantras has recently been examined by Robert Sharf in "On Esoteric Buddhism in China," which appears as an appendix in his *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*.[53] Following Sharf, Richard D. McBride has given a detailed account of Chinese Buddhist expressions sensibly translated as esoteric and exoteric, mostly in the Six Dynasties and early Tang period.[54] By problematizing the "preinterpretive assumptions" of the category "Esoteric Buddhism" these essays have made a substantial contribution to our understanding of the context and reception of Tantras in Tang and Song China.

Coming to Terms studies the *Treasure Store Treatise* (*Baozang lun* 寶藏論 T 1857), a short text attributed to the Mādhyamika exegete Sengzhao 僧肇 (374-414). Prompted by the incongruity between a text that appears to be a syncretic and anomalous jumble of Buddhist, Daoist, and Ruist themes, and the high esteem accorded it by an impressive array of Tang and Song Chan masters, Sharf sets out to explain how this text could have found favor among Chan cognoscenti. The problem, he argues, is that dominant models for studying Chinese Buddhism have tended "to confuse sectarian polemics with social history."[55] The school/syncretism model in particular has led scholars to insinuate social institutions where they did not exist, reducing "complex social and ideological networks to interactions among discrete teachings, lineages, and schools" and relegating what does not fit this binary model to insignificance. The result in the case of the *Treasure Store Treatise* was that modern scholars,

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[51] The one criticism I have heard of Davidson's polythetic definition of Esoteric Buddhism is that it is a good definition of Tantric Buddhism and that Esoteric Buddhism should be reserved for the broader phenomena of late Mahāyāna religion using mantras, etc., but without identification.

[52] The dichotomy assumes a pure vs. hybrid structure to religious phenomena. See Abé's critique in *The Weaving of Mantra*, 152-154 and especially and his bibliographical materials. On the problem with regard to Chinese materials see Orzech, "Seeing *Chen-yen* Buddhism;" Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, 127-133; and Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 265-267.

[53] Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 263-278.

[54] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 329-356.

[55] Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism,* 8.

in their attempt to fit the text into a procrustean Japanese institutional taxonomy, interpreted "a Sung dynasty exegetical category … for a T'ang dynasty religious sect."[56] Thus the reputed "Two-fold Mystery School" that scholars had posited as the matrix of the *Baozang lun* was a modern artifact. Eschewing the binary sect / syncretism model, Sharf argues that the *Baozang lun*'s popularity rested on the indigenous hermeneutical trope of hidden sympathetic resonances (*ganying* 感應) and thus propounded "a Buddhist truth" that was a manifestation of a particular Chinese religious milieu.

Sharf's analysis of the reception of the *Baozang lun* shows that preinterpretive assumptions led scholars to construct a "school" where none existed. A social context was 'deduced' on the basis of doctrinal assumptions that ultimately had their origins in the present, rather than in the past, and as a result the way Tang dynasty Chinese readers understood the text was obscured. "On Esoteric Buddhism" which appears as Appendix A of *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* extends the book's thesis: could it be that "Esoteric Buddhism" in China is also a scholarly artifact (modern or pre-modern) or even the result of Japanese influence on Song dynasty thinkers? What is the historical basis for the widely accepted account of the Esoteric school in the Tang?

Sharf posits that a distinctive "Esoteric Buddhism" first arises as an exegetical category in the writings of Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001) at the end of the tenth century.[57] He puts forward three arguments with regard to the eighth-century teachers: First, that "Chinese texts show little if any awareness of an exalted lineage of esoteric masters going back to Mahāvairocana and Vajrasattva."[58] Second, that the Tang masters Śubhākara-siṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra did not regard their teachings "as constituting a conceptual break with prevailing forms of Buddhist doctrine or ritual." And third, that they had no "intention of founding a new sect."[59]

A key element of this critique is the recognition that the distinction between "esoteric teaching" (*mijiao* 密教) and "exoteric teaching" (*xianjiao* 顯教) has a complex history in Chinese Buddhism, a history too easily eclipsed by the contemporary division of Buddhism into "Hīnayāna," Mahāyāna, and Esoteric traditions. As Richard McBride's recent article clearly demonstrates, fundamental taxonomic assumptions regarding Buddhism in medieval China were heavily biased toward the Mahāyāna, a bias enshrined in the very categories of Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna.[60] In that environment Mahāyāna was often touted as "esoteric" in contrast to the "exoteric" teachings of the inferior vehicles. Such uses are found, for instance, in the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (*Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 T 1509):

There are two kinds of Buddhadharma: 1) Esoteric (*mimi* 祕密) and 2) exoteric

[56] Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism,* 56.
[57] Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism,* 269.
[58] Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism,* 275.
[59] Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism,* 277-278.
[60] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 331.

> (*xianshi* 顯示). In the exoteric [form], the Buddha, pratyekabuddha, and arhat are all fields of merit since their defilements have been exhausted without residue. In the esoteric [form], it is explained that bodhisattvas attain the acquiescence to the non-production of the dharmas … [61]

By the fifth century it was a fairly common to depict the Mahāyāna—whether the skillful means of the bodhisattva or the teaching of the Vaipulya scriptures—as "esoteric." Indeed, according to the *Nirvāṇa sūtra* while teachings that inspire people to leave the world are not esoteric, those that entice them into the bodhisattva path are so because they are conducive to finally seeing the true nature of reality.[62]

It is in the last pages of the essay that McBride takes up the Tang dynasty masters Śubhākara-siṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra. Examining the work of Śubhākara-siṃha and Yixing 一行 (683-727), he notes, "in each of the six times 'esoteric teaching' is used in the their *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana sūtra* it is deployed in a way not fundamentally different than the preexisting tradition as representing advanced Mahāyāna teachings."[63] Further, "there is no attempt on the part of Śubhākara-siṃha or Yixing to differentiate their 'esoteric teaching' from the advanced Mahāyāna teachings; rather, they emphasize that it is 'esoteric teaching of the Mahāyāna.'"[64] Nevertheless, it is difficult to transmit and they are clear that to receive and observe their esoteric teaching requires special spiritual capacities."[65]

Turning then to Amoghavajra, McBride looks at the brief *Encomium on a General Interpretation of the Meaning of Dhāraṇī* (*Zongshi tuoluoni yizan* 總釋陀羅尼義讚 T 902), and concludes that, "Amoghavajra's statements seem to support the idea of a separate esoteric teaching, but since he does not explain what he means by either esoteric teaching or exoteric teaching we are left to conclude that his deployment of these terms follows the standard intellectual interpretation."[66] Citing Sharf, McBride also credits Zanning as the source of the Esoteric school:

> In a brief editorial comment following the hagiography of the three "Esoteric" masters he classifies them as among those who promulgated the "Wheel of Instruction and Command" and adds that "Zanning also says that 'they claim to teach the great doctrine of Yoga' … [T]he fact that Zanning coins a new classification and does not employ the idea of 'esoteric teaching' is circumstantial evidence that

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[61] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 332-334, and his translation of *Dazhidu lun*. T 1509 25.84c-85a.

[62] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 336.

[63] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 349. Osabe Kazuo gives a detailed treatment of the influential polymath "Northern School" Chan monk Yixing who was a student of Puji 普寂 (651-739) and collaborator with Śubhākara-siṃha, in *Ichigyōzenji no kenkyū*. As I note below, there are numerous Chan-Esoteric interactions in the mid- to late-Tang.

[64] The text reads *ci dasheng mijiao* 此大乘密教 T 1796 39.787a10.

[65] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 350.

[66] McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" 351.

'esoteric teaching' still simply referred to the advanced teachings of the Mahāyāna.[67]

To sum up the findings of Sharf and McBride, it would seem that, from the Six Dynasties through the Tang, the term "esoteric teaching" is used to designate what this or that writer feels is superior or best in the tradition, and it only in the tenth century that we see the emergence of an exegetical category that contrasts "esoteric teaching" with "exoteric teaching" to designate a particular lineage, school, or tradition comparable to Shingon in Japan or Vajrayāna sects in Tibet.

With regard to the term "esoteric teaching" I think this is substantially correct, though I still argue—as I do in detail at the end of this essay—that the term Esoteric Buddhism *is* a useful one. Nonetheless, it is important that we keep in mind we are dealing with propagandists (I use this word deliberately in its more technical and historical senses) who were well aware both of the innovative dimensions of the new texts and the ways in which they were part of a continuous trajectory within the Mahāyāna. Problematizing the term "esoteric" is a salutary step but it does not provide answers to some key historical questions. Zanning undoubtedly had a distinctive form of Buddhism in mind when he characterized the teachings of Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, Huilang, and their proponents as the "Wheel of Instruction and Command," and "the Great Teaching of Yoga." Elsewhere, in his discourse on translation that appears at the end of the section on "Translators" (*yijing* 譯經) in the *Lives of Eminent Monks Composed in the Song* he says that, "the Esoteric Teaching 密教 is the method of Yoga: the *abhiṣeka* of the five divisions, the *homa*, the three secrets, and the methods for the mandala."[68] Even if we agree that Zanning is innovating with respect to the term "Esoteric Teaching," what of this "Yoga"? Can we conclude that the "Great Teaching of Yoga" is a product of the tenth century, or is there any basis for it in the eighth century?

Japanese scholars have, of course, long argued for a Tang origin to the "Great Teaching of Yoga," and though one might suspect an anachronistic agenda, this is not always the case. Two Japanese scholars who have done outstanding work on the Chinese appropriation of Tantras are Osabe Kazuo and Yoritomo Motohiro. Osabe has spent considerable effort in tracing post-Kūkai developments in the late Tang and early Song Dynasties, and Yoritomi's *Chūgoku Mikkyō no kenkyū* touches on some of what both Sharf's essay and this one

[67] Quotes are from 352. McBride's comment implies that Zanning's comment appears after the biographies of Śubhākara-siṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, when in fact it follows biographies of Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra. Zanning places Śubhākara-siṃha's biography elsewhere. This confusion is important. Unless carefully read, Chou's masterpiece study and translation of the biographies of Śubhākara-siṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, "Tantrism in China" also gives the impression that Zanning groups the three together. Also, McBride conjectures that Zanning's classification "great teaching of Yoga" is why some monks are known as Yoga monks. This is only indirectly the case. Rites for ghosts were revamped by Amoghavajra and the manuals bear the title "Yoga" (*yuqie*). In the Ming Dynasty monasteries were designated as Chan 禪, Jiang 講 ("Lecture"), or Yoga 瑜伽, the latter specializing in rites for the dead. See Ryūchi Kiyoshi "Mindai no yūga kyōsō," 405-413.

[68] T 50 2061.724b18: 瑜伽灌頂五部護摩三密曼拏羅法也.

explore.[69] Yoritomi's book is divided into two parts, the first of which deals with the little studied though important translator Prajña 般若 (734-810? "Prajña's Esoteric Buddhism") while the second deals with Zanning's understanding of Esoteric Buddhism ("Zanning's Vision of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism"). This second portion focuses on the characteristics of Amoghavajra's Buddhism (including his promotion of State protection through the *Scripture for Humane Kings* (*Renwang jing* 仁王經 T 246) and his championing of the teachings of the STTS, and Zanning's appropriation and interpretation of them. The most striking difference between Yoritomi and Sharf is the former scholar's location of the origin of the "Esoteric Teaching" with Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra, and the latter scholar's locating it with Zanning himself.

The Great Teaching of Yoga and the Mahāyāna

When we examine Zanning's treatment of the Tang dynasty teachers in *Lives of Eminent Monks Composed in the Song* one thing is notable—the grouping of the biographies is purposive. The first *zhuan* of the first segment of the work—that devoted to translators (*yijing* 譯經)—treats Yijing 義淨 (635-713), whose biography is followed by a comment by Zanning. Zanning then turns to Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra (and mentions Huilang 慧朗) followed by a comment on the "Great Teaching of Yoga." Śubhākara-siṃha, Prajña, and other teachers of reputedly "esoteric" texts are placed in the next *zhuan* or elsewhere in the work. Zanning's designation of Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, and Huilang *as a distinct lineage* is underscored by the fact that he separates them from Śubhākara-siṃha and others. In contrast to this treatment, in the "Transmission of the Esoteric Treasury" (*Chuan mizang* 傳密藏) that forms a section of his *Outline of Clerical History* (*Seng shilue* 僧史略 T 2126) written at the end of his life, Zanning employs a different taxonomy centered on the transmission of *dhāraṇī* scriptures and the construction of altars. There, Amoghavajra is classified with other monks known for their contributions in this regard and *not* with Vajrabodhi and Huilang.[70] Are these taxonomies entirely products of the Song? Does either have any basis in the Tang?

Shingon scholars and some influential modern scholars like Chou I-liang have traditionally grouped together the three Tang ācāryas. Shingon, however also distinguishes between them, arguing that one portion of the "pure" esoteric tradition—that concerning the STTS—was transmitted by Vajrabodhi through Amoghavajra, while another portion—that concerning the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra*—came through the lineage of Śubhākara-siṃha.[71] Zanning's treatment of Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra seems to confirm this

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[69] Yoritomi, *Chūgoku Mikkyō no kenkyū*. Osabe has explored the Chinese developments in *Tōdai Mikkyōshi zakkō*, which focuses on Amoghavajra and his school, and in *Tō Sō Mikkyōshi ronkō* which treats various "miscellaneous" developments including the increasing importance of *Susiddhi* and rites for ghosts and so on.

[70] T 2126 54.240c08.

[71] Ironically, Chou's grouping follows that of the Japanese, not that of Zanning. One also wonders

distinction. But as Zanning's writings show awareness of Japanese developments we cannot rule out that his "Great Teaching of Yoga" taxonomy has taken inspiration there.[72] I will take up Zanning below, but for the moment I wish to examine Tang evidence for the "Great Teaching of Yoga" lineage.

What Tang evidence is there that Amoghavajra thought of his teachings and those of his teacher Vajrabodhi as distinctive? How did they conceive of the relationship between their recently imported teachings and long-standing Mahāyāna traditions? Obviously a comprehensive answer to these questions is beyond the scope of this essay, but some broad outlines can certainly be given. Amoghavajra was a consummate politician, as his survival at the upper reaches of the Tang court for three decades testifies.[73] How he articulated his teaching and its relationship to existing Mahāyāna is, like Kūkai's, a product of ideology and the exigencies of his situation. What Amoghavajra thought of the teachings of the STTS he acquired during his South Asian sojourn and how he adapted the teachings for his Tang audience can be traced in a variety of ways, not the least of which is language. Therefore I begin by examining some of the key vocabulary used (or not used) by the mid-Tang masters.

The term mantra (*zhenyan* 眞言) is ubiquitous in Tang and Song scriptures.[74] *Zhenyan sheng* 眞言乘, a locution that would sensibly render *Mantrayāna* is, however, rare. It appears in several places in the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra* and in its *Commentary*, but does not seem to have been in wide use and is not used by Vajrabodhi or Amoghavajra.[75] *Zhenyan zang* 眞言藏 (*Mantrapiṭaka*) is likewise used by Śubhākara-siṃha and Yixing in the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi sūtra* and its *Commentary* as well as in a few other texts (including one translated by 天息災 Devaśāntika (?) (d. 1000, under the Northern Song).[76] Nonetheless, its use is quite restricted. The term Mantra School (*Zhenyan zong* 眞言宗 Japanese *Shingonshū*) is not found in medieval Chinese texts. "Mantra teaching" (*Zhenyan jiao* 眞言教), however, appears fifty one times in the canon, including in Zhao Qian's 趙遷 *Xingzhuang* 行狀 (T 2056) biography of Amoghavajra, extensively in works attributed to Amoghavajra, in Śubhākara-siṃha and Yixing's *Commentary*, in translations by Dharmadeva and Devaśāntika in the Song, and even in a few early translations, including one by Chu Fahu.

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whether his "Tantrism in China" was not influenced by the growing literature on "Tantrism." In all I have read by Amoghavajra he never once mentions Śubhākara-siṃha. Much effort has been spent in Japan on tracing the two transmissions so that they come together in a manner that legitimates the position affirmed by Shingon orthodoxy giving equal weight to both. Zanning keeps them separate in *Song gaoseng zhuan*.

[72] See, for instance, T 2126 54.240c15.

[73] For details see Chou, "Tantrism in China" and Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, especially chapters four and five.

[74] As McBride "Dhāraṇī and Spells in Medieval Sinitic Buddhism" points out, the term is also used to translate *dhāraṇī* through the first half of the eighth century. See 110, note 85.

[75] Śubhākara-siṃha and Yixing use it. See for instance, T 848 18.5c08, c09, 51a29, 54c19, T 860 18.188a04; T 1796 39.625c25, c27, 671a12.

[76] T 1191 20.903b05.

竺法護[77] It is sometimes paired up with "gate" (*men* 門) or with "method" (*fa* 法) and it seems best to translate it as mantra teaching(s) or mantra techniques. Thus far, all we can ascertain is that Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra do not use the term *Mantrayāna*.

Like *zhenyan*, vajra (*jin'gang* 金剛) is frequently employed. In comparison with *Mantrayāna* (*Zhenyan sheng*) *Jin'gang sheng* 金剛乘 or Vajrayāna has a somewhat wider use and appears in works by Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra (and in those of the Song translators such as Dānapāla 施護 (fl. 970s), and Dharmabhadra 法賢 (d. 1001). Yixing uses it in the great *Commentary*. Amoghavajra uses it pointedly in the very last passage of his *Indications of the Goals of the Eighteen Assemblies of the Yoga of the Adamantine Summit Scripture* (*Jin'gangding jing yuqie shiba hui zhigui* 金剛頂經瑜伽十八會之歸), "These are called the teachings of the Adamantine Vehicle of Yoga" (名瑜伽金剛乘教法).[78] Clearly the term was known, was used to designate a distinct vehicle, and was not the property of a single lineage. Indeed, Amoghavajra *qualifies* Vajrayāna to specify which kind of Vajrayāna he is referring to (i.e., that of the Yoga).[79] Thus, in the mid-Tang *Mantrayāna* and *Mantrapiṭaka* are terms closely associated with Śubhākara-siṃha, while Vajrayāna shows up in Yixing's, Vajrabodhi's, and Amoghavajra's works.

The term "yoga" (*yuqie* 瑜伽) that appears above in "Adamantine Vehicle of Yoga" and in Zanning's appraisal is another fairly common term. Numerous translations and ritual manuals use the term "yoga" thus. For instance, throughout his *Indications of the Goals of the Eighteen Assemblies*, Amoghavajra discusses various yogas such as the "yoga of Trailokyavijayavajra" (降三世金剛瑜伽)[80] and the "yoga of the Guhyasamāja" (祕密集會瑜伽).[81] The term "Yoga Teaching" (*yuqiejiao* 瑜伽教) appears repeatedly and *only* in works attributed to Amoghavajra.[82] Here it is sometimes a generic reference, "in the Teachings of Yoga" (*yu yuqiejiao zhong* 於瑜伽教中); while at other times it is more specific: "that in the 'Vajra sūtras' indicates the methods of the Yoga Teachings of the Vajrayāna" (金剛修多羅者指瑜伽教金剛乘法也).[83]

The term "Great Teaching of Yoga" (*yuqie dajiao* 瑜伽大教) is a part of the title of many texts in the STTS cycle and occasionally occurs on its own—in the work of Amoghavajra.[84]

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[77] Zhao Qian's comment is found at T 2056 50.293a10: 自爾覺無常師遍更討尋諸眞言教. The occurrence in Chu Fahu's work is at T 310 11.48a09: 當執持此至眞言教.

[78] T 869 18.287c12. I follow Giebel's translation here. See "The *Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei*," 200. (One could also translate the final *fa* as "methods" to produce, "These are called the methods of the Adamantine Vehicle of Yoga," though teachings seems the better choice given the context of a list of scriptures.

[79] Thus the line might be rendered "these are called the methods of the Yoga (tantra) Vajrayāna."

[80] T 869 18.286b09.

[81] T 869 18.287a28.

[82] T 18 871; T 19 921, 957, 996, 1003, 1072; T 20 1177A (probably a false attribution); T 21 1210, 1211. It also occurs in some commentarial, historical, and catalogue materials of later dates.

[83] T 996 19.524a10; T 1003 19.617a29-b1.

[84] It occurs "stand-alone" in T 18 874; T 19 957; and T 20 1177A.

Taken by itself, the term "Great Teaching" can designate the teaching of the Buddha generally, but more commonly referred to the Mahāyāna. But when "yoga" is found together with "Great Teaching" it is almost always followed by the term "King" 王 to yield "Great King of the Teaching" (*dajiaowang* 大教王). This is the usage in the list of scriptures presented to the Emperor by Amoghavajra in 771, as in the case of the first scripture in the list: *Jin'gangding yuqie zhenshi dajiao wang* 金剛頂瑜伽眞實大教王.[85] This usage is found extensively in titles beginning in Amoghavajra's time and proliferating by the time of Zanning when a new wave of government sponsored translations was underway.[86]

It is notable that in Amoghavajra's works the term "esoteric teaching" (*mijiao* 密教) is not drawn in sharp contrast with "exoteric teaching" (*xianjiao* 顯教) as part of a polarized hermeneutic found in Song or Japanese works.[87] I count twenty occurrences of the locution (ignoring other compounds with the word *mi*) in seventeen different texts attributed to Amoghavajra.[88] Most instances of "esoteric teaching" occur in *gāthas* or hymns. The following, from *Instructions for Recitation of the Heart [mantra] of the Lotus Family of the Adamantine Summit* (*Jin'gangding lianhuabu xin niansong yigui* 金剛頂蓮華部心念誦儀軌): "Siddhi words are secretly taught, adamantine words transcend sound."[89] Elsewhere we even find the phrase "Esoteric Wheel of Instruction and Command" (*mijiao ling lun* 密教令輪).[90]

The STTS and its vocabulary were important for Amoghavajra and this is evident in his correspondence as well as in his translation vocabulary. He frequently praises the singular virtues of what Zanning calls the "Great Teaching of Yoga"—those teachings based on the template of the STTS, both as a *supplement* to the Mahāyāna and as the pinnacle of all Buddhism.[91] Amoghavajra's attitude should come as no surprise. When he learned of the

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[85] T 2120 52.839a28.

[86] See for example, 18 874; 882, 883, 885, etc. T 869 18.287a28. When it occurs in titles in the Taishō the phrase is almost always "Great King of the Teaching Scripture" (*Da jiaowang jing* 大教王經). In the case of Amoghavajra's title the word "scripture" does not appear in the earliest source (the Korean printing of the canon) and it seems that the Taishō editors added it where it was missing. *Jing* is simply functioning as a Chinese marker of any sacred authoritative text.

[87] *Zongshi tuoluoni yi zan* 總釋陀羅尼義讚 (T 902) analyzed by McBride is the only text I could find attributed to Amoghavajra that uses both the term "esoteric teaching" and the term "exoteric teaching." It does not have a plausible counterpart in Amoghavajra's list of scriptures, is not attested in contemporary catalogues, and first appears as a text retrieved by the Japanese pilgrim Engyō, a disciple of Kūkai. For him see *Bukkyō daijiten* 298. I therefore suspect it is a false attribution

[88] As noted above, we must take care about attribution of texts to Amoghavajra. I prefer to stick to titles that appear in his own list of translations dated to 771 and further attested in contemporary catalogues. There are at least 14 other scriptures attributed to Amoghavajra in volumes other than 18-21, though none of these contains the phrase *mijiao*.

[89] T 873 18.309b17: 成就語密教 金剛語離聲. This appears to be text 38 in Amoghavajra's list. The same verse appears at T 874 18.321c23.

[90] T 1211 21.43c16. I will discuss the translation of the phrase *jiaoling lun* below.

[91] Amoghavajra's Chinese version of the text (T 865), itself a translation of the first chapter of the first section of the text, was completed in 754. Giebel has translated this into English in *Two Esoteric*

STTS but was refused full initiation by his master Vajrabodhi he prepared to leave for India. Only then did Vajrabodhi initiate him. Even so, after his master's death he did travel to South Asia to seek the full teachings.[92] Indeed, when we examine Amoghavajra's writings he repeatedly refers to the special qualities of the STTS teachings, using several terms, including the "five families" (*wubu* 五部), "the yoga of the eighteen assemblies (*shiba hui yuqie* 十八會瑜伽)," or the "yoga of the five familes (*wubu yuqie* 五部瑜伽)."[93] Its "methods" are "secretly transmitted" as are the mudrās of the "five wisdoms" and "the three esoterica."[94] Access to these is through a progressively restricted series of *abhiṣeka* 灌頂 (consecration *guanding*), the most advanced of which entail enlightenment and empower the practitioner to control deities and cosmic forces through the performance of *homa* (*humo* 護摩). In his will, shortly after reiterating these special aspects of the teaching Amoghavajra lists his disciples, beginning with those fully initiated into the STTS.[95]

> At present I have been offering *abhiṣeka* for more than thirty years. Those who have entered the altar to receive the Dharma are many, but only eight have been established in the Five Families, and two have died—thus there are only six. Those who have attained it are Hanguang of the Jinko [temple], Hyech'o of Silla, Huiguo of Qinglong [temple], Huilang of Chongfu [temple], Yuanzhao and Quezhao of Baoshou [temple].[96]

The passages can certainly be multiplied. Initiation into these teachings was reserved for the few, and then only after rigorous special training.

Near the end of his life, in a memorial to the emperor accompanying a list of seventy-one scriptures he had translated, Amoghavajra says, "I served my Master Vajrabodhi for twenty-four years and received the methods of Yoga. I traveled to India to search out those I had not yet received and all the scriptures and commentaries … In all I obtained over five hundred mantras, scriptures and commentaries on the Yoga. I presented careful translations of the Sage's words to the State to promote reverence and prosperity" 稟受瑜伽法門 後遊五夫尋求所未受者并諸經論 更重學習 凡得梵本瑜伽眞言經論五百餘部 奉爲國 家詳譯聖言 廣崇福祐.[97] A look at the list confirms the overwhelming dominance in it of the STTS cycle scriptures and ritual manuals. It is framed by his partial translation of the STTS and the

Sutras, 1-141.

[92] He was gone roughly five years, returning in 746. See Chou, "Tantrism," 290-292.

[93] T 2120 52.844a25, 52.844b17, etc. T 869 18.287b22. The *wubu* refers to the five Buddha-families and the five chief Buddhas of the mandala.

[94] T 2120 52.844a25-29.

[95] An English translation of this document is available in Orlando, "A Study of Chinese Documents Concerning the Life of the Tantric Buddhist Patriarch Amoghavajra (A.D. 705-774)," 106-130. The original is T 2120 52.844a16-845a24.

[96] T 2120 52.844a29-b2.

[97] T 52 2120 840a.

Adhyardhaśatikāprajñāpāramitā sūtra (numbers 1-2) representing in Amoghavajra's words "the quick path to Buddhahood" and the *Scripture for Humane Kings* and two commentaries (numbers 69, 71, and 72), representing "the Buddha's skillful means."[98] The bulk of the list is loosely organized into groups of scriptures, including seven on Avalokiteśvara, three on Mañjuśrī, four on Samantabhadra, and so forth.[99] The list includes nineteen texts overtly connected with the STTS and 23 ritual manuals.[100]

So, did Amoghavajra see the STTS as *replacing* the Mahāyāna? Certainly not. Take, for instance, the following passage, written as introduction to a collection of his works to be entered into the imperially sanctioned list of Buddhist scriptures:

> Of those [works I have] translated, the *Yoga of the Summit of the Vajra* (*Jin'gangding yuqie famen* 金剛頂瑜伽法門) is the teaching for swiftly becoming a Buddha. Those who cultivate it will perforce suddenly transcend (*dunchao* 頓超) all limitations and reach the other shore.
>
> As for the remaining classes of mantra and all the Buddha's skillful means—their disciples are legion. All those [kinds of texts I have] translated are canonical scriptures of the Mahāyāna. I present [them] to the State for the pacification of disasters, to keep the stars on their regular courses, and to insure that the wind and rain are timely.[101]

Indeed, some of these texts reinforce the continuity between the Mahāyāna and the Esoteric teaching in exactly the ways that McBride has pointed to. Thus, in a manual on the single-character *uṣṇīṣa*, we find the phrase "the secret gate of the Mahāyāna" (*dasheng mimimen* 大乘祕密門).[102] In another passage, Amoghavajra says, "The Great Teaching, so vast and expansive! The Yoga secrets, who can plumb their source?" 大教總特浩汗深廣 瑜

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[98] A full translation of the STTS was not to appear until Zanning's contemporary, Dānapāla (施護 fl. 970s) provided one under the auspices of the Institute for Canonical Translation. It is T 882. On the *Adhyardhaśatikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* see Astley-Kristensen, *The Rishukyō*.

[99] By and large scriptural translation is toward the front of the list and ritual manuals are toward the back (although there are exceptions to this as well).

[100] Sixteen of these texts are primarily apotropaic and nine are dubbed *dhāraṇī*. There are texts dedicated to the primary bodhisattvas including Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, Kṣitigarbha and Ākāśagarbha, as well as one dedicated to Amitābha. If we include Avalokiteśvara thirteen texts deal with female divinities, including Cundā and Hāritī.

[101] T 2120 52.840b1-5. Amoghavajra's characterization of the STTS as promoting "sudden transcendence" (*dunchao* 頓超), is certainly part of an eighth century economy involving "sudden" versus "gradual" practice and attainment in Chan circles. Yoritomi's discussion situates with regard to Japanese developments and ignores the Tang context. *Chūgoku Mikkyō no kenkyū*, 137-138. Gregory includes discussion of this important notion in *Tsung-mi*, especially 146-153, and in "Sudden Enlightenment Followed by Gradual Cultivation: Tsung-mi's Analysis of Mind," 279-320.

[102] T 19, 957 320c25.

伽祕密誰測其源.[103] If by "Great Teaching" Amoghavajra means the Mahāyāna, then the metaphor clearly relates the Esoteric teachings to the Mahāyāna as the Ocean's depth is related to its breadth.

Amoghavajra certainly regarded the teachings of the STTS as the supreme teaching and, I dare say, as "esoteric." Access to the teachings and deployment of its ritual technology were closely guarded and available only after considerable training and a series of specialized initiations at the hands of an *ācārya*. Only the best of the best were granted access to the innermost teachings. Further, Amoghavajra and his disciples garnered a great deal of institutional support, especially during the reign of Daizong 代宗 (r. 762-779). This support included a massive building project on Mt. Wutai, a permanent presence in the inner chapel of the palace (*nei daochang* 内道場), and government sponsored translation activities, ritual activities at government monasteries, and so on.[104]

Amoghavajra's representations regarding the "Yoga" are consonant with contemporary understandings in India and Tibet, as can be seen from comments by Buddhaguhya made in the late eighth century regarding the three kinds of Tantra: *Kriyā*, Yoga, and "Dual" (*ubhaya*).[105] Amoghavajra considered the "Yoga" as supreme, it was cultically distinctive, it had a distinctive pantheon with a marked emphasis on the *vidyārājas* (*mingwang* 明王), and it was instantiated in a variety of official and semi-official institutional settings. These activities have strong parallels in cults of protection based on the Yogatantra in Tibet, Nanzhao, and Japan, as well as in South Asia. While Amoghavajra clearly promoted the STTS, he had plenty of use for the Buddha's "expedient means," and his disciples and later Chinese thinkers were even more aggressive in integrating the teachings, iconography, and practices of the "Great Teaching of Yoga" into their own understanding of Buddhism. But with Sharf I have to say that the evidence is that Amoghavajra had no "intention of founding a new sect." Indeed, the notion probably never occurred to him.

Is there any evidence that Amoghavajra or his teacher Vajrabodhi appealed to "an exalted lineage of esoteric masters going back to Mahāvairocana and Vajrasattva"? Shingon scholars have long answered yes, but their arguments depend upon an elision of evidence from Amoghavajra and from his disciples. In fact, Amoghavajra's report of Vajrabodhi's account of the origins of the STTS is vague concerning transmission. Indeed, in *Instructions on the Gate to the Teaching of the Secret Heart of Mahā-yoga of the Scripture of the Adamantine Summit* Amoghavajra goes into considerable ritual and textual detail concerning the opening of the "iron stūpa" in India from which the teachings of the STTS were purportedly recovered, but identifies the adept in question only as a "great worthy" (*dade* 大德, Sanskrit *bhadanta*). From there the story jumps abruptly to Vajrabodhi's sea voyage to China with the outline of

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[103] T 2120 52.844a18.

[104] For a discussion of the institutional support see Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 140-146. For a detailed description of the vicissitudes of the "inner palace chapels" see Chen Jinhua, "The Tang Buddhist Palace Chapels," 101-173.

[105] See Hodge, *Mahāvairocana-abhisaṃbodhi Tantra*, 43.

the text, described as "broad and long like a bed, and four or five feet thick."[106] The focus on ritual is fully in concert with the fact that each initiation of a disciple into the STTS recapitulates the entry into the "iron stūpa." The ideological force of this tale is sited in ritual, not in lineage.

Terminators

In contrast to Amoghavajra's clear elevation of the "Yoga" of the STTS, his disciples tend to emphasize the inclusive or ecumenical nature of his teachings. For instance, Zhao Qian relates the story of Vajrabodhi's finally being convinced of Amoghavajra's worthiness in a dream, after he had *denied* his request for the Dharma. On awakening, he sent for Amoghavajra, who was preparing to depart for India to find a teacher:

> The patriarch (*zushi* 祖師) was delighted—" I will completely transmit my Dharma-treasury to you. Then, on another morning on his behalf he transmitted to Amoghavajra the methods of the Five Families, the *abhiṣeka*, the *homa*—the teachings an *ācārya* should know. [He also transmitted] the *Mahāvairocana sūtra* and the manuals of *Susiddhi*, all of the *Buddhoṣṇīṣa* divisions, and all of the mantra practices.[107]

A similar list near the end of the biography adds *śīla*, *dhyāna*, and *prajñā* 戒定慧 and the mean between sudden and gradual (*dunjian banman* 頓漸半滿).[108] Such pronouncements are in keeping with well-known developments in China and Japan, including the proliferation of ritual manuals during the ninth century, the so-called Susiddhi synthesis of the *Susiddhimahākara-tantra* with the STTS and the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra*, and a flourishing and ecumenical interest in Esoteric deities, rituals, and mandalas evident in the reliquary chamber of the collapsed pagoda of the Famen monastery.[109]

Amoghavajra's disciples had their own agendas. In what is perhaps the first hint of a "lineage," Feixi's 飛錫 stele biography (*bei* 碑) of Amoghavajra records Vajrabodhi's initial

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[106] T 1798 39.808a19-b28, *Jin'gangding jing da yuqie bimi xindi famen yigui* 金剛頂經大瑜伽祕密心地法門義訣. The quote is from 808a26.

[107] T 2056 50.292c8-11.

[108] T 2056 50.294b23-26.

[109] The *Susiddhimahākara-tantra* (T 893) was seen in certain late Tang Esoteric lineages as a third, integrating principle uniting the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra* and the STTS. For these developments see R. Misaki, "On the Thought of Susiddhi in the Esoteric Buddhism of the Late T'ang Dynasty," 255-281, and Osabe, "On the Two Schools of Garbhodbhava Esoteric Buddhism in the Latter Period of the T'ang Dynasty and the Method of the Three Siddhis," 237-254. Osabe goes into greater depth in *Tōdai Mikkyōshi zakkō*, 209-252. For a detailed discussion of the Famen Pagoda finds see Wu and Han, *Famen si digong Tangmi manchaluo zhi yanjiu*.

reluctance to instruct Amoghavajra in "the Yoga School" (*yuqie zong* 瑜伽宗).[110] Further, despite a lack of lineage formulation in works by Vajrabodhi or Amoghavajra, exploration of other sources reveals that Kūkai's claims were based on Tang foundations and were not Japanese fabrications.[111] Shortly after Amoghavajra's death Yan Ying 嚴郢[112] and Zhao Qian,[113] both lay disciples of Amoghavajra, recount the transmission of the STTS from an "iron stūpa" in a lineage encompassing Mahāvairocana, Vajrasattva, Nāgārjuna, Nāgabodhi, and Vajrabodhi.[114] Lu Xiang (a lay disciple of Vajrabodhi) had already recounted a similar though somewhat truncated lineage.[115] Zhao Qian remarks that, "from the origin flows a single tradition perhaps comprised of only some ten persons and that is it! As if a single house, the legitimate disciples continued in succession with my master as the sixth to receive it."[116] Yan Ying's stele biography, dated 781, proclaims in language commonly associated with Chan that, "from Vairocana to the monk [Amoghavajra] are a total of six "petals" (*fan liuye yi* 凡六葉矣, 860b10), and declares that Huilang succeeded his master and "attained the decree to transmit the lamp" (*de chuan deng zhi zhi* 得傳燈之旨, 860b21).[117]

As I noted above, we know that Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra did tell the story of the retrieval of the STTS by a "great worthy" and its introduction to China by Vajrabodhi. But this story's function is closely linked to ritual practice where it provides a narrative and historicized version of the entry into the mandala repeated by each initiate. What is clear is

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[110] T 2120 848b28-9.

[111] All of the following are included in Yuanzhao's *Daizong chao sekong dabian zheng guangzhi sanzang hoshang biaozhiji* (T 2120), a document brought by Kūkai to Japan in 805. See Kūkai's memorial T 2161 55.1064b04 and the treatment in Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 191-205, and the partial translation by Orlando.

[112] Yan Ying was very well connected. At the time of Amoghavajra's death he held the post of Censor General 御史大夫. He is mentioned in *XinTangshu*, "Yan Ying zhuan," (Liezhuan 70) 145.17a-19b. For Amoghavajra's other patrons see Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 144 n. 31.

[113] Zhao Qian mentions in his *Xingzhuang* that he was Amoghavajra's disciple for nine years (T 2056 50.294c4) and that he was a literary advisor to the emperor (Hanlin daizhao 翰林待詔). Amoghavajra mentions him as an assistant in translation work in his testamentary epistle (T 2120 52.844b24).

[114] Yan Ying's account is at T 2120 52.860b4-10. Zhao Qian's account is at T 2056 50.292b20-25.

[115] T 2157 55.875b9-14.

[116] Interestingly, throughout this account Zhao Qian refers to Vajrabodhi as Zushi, "patriarchal master." The whole passage reads, "Long ago Bhagavān Vairocana bestowed the mantras, methods and mudrās of the *Jingangding yujie bimi jiaowang* upon Vajrapāni bodhisattva. These were handed down for nearly a thousand years and were transmitted to Nāgārjuna bodhisattva. After a further several hundred years Nāgārjuna transmitted them to Nāgābodhi ācārya. After a further several hundred years Nāgābodhi transmitted them to Vajrabodhi ācārya, and Vajrabodhi transmitted them to the present great teacher (Amoghavajra). Consequently, from the origin flows a single tradition (*sui yuan yiliu pai* 雖源一流派) perhaps comprised of only some ten persons and that is it! As if a single house 家, the legitimate disciples continued in succession with my master as the sixth to receive it." T 2056 292b16-21.

[117] T 2120 52.860b21: 沙門惠朗受次補之記。得傳燈之旨。繼明佛日。紹六爲七。至矣哉。The poem that follows reiterates the petals and the highest vehicle.

that its transmission was *not* conceived of by Amoghavajra as one that was exclusive and unique, and limited to a single "legitimate" disciple in each generation. The pattern of multiple transmission is affirmed by Amoghavajra in his will when he lists the disciples who have been fully "established in the Five Families" (the deities of the STTS), and this pattern is consonant with that found in South Asian contexts.

Yuanzhao's *Biaozhi ji* which dates to the last quarter of the eighth century and contains Yan Ying's stele of 781 can be seen as a part of an effort to get esoteric rites reinstated in the imperial chapel after they were terminated on Dezong's 德宗 (r. 780-804) accession to the throne in 780.[118] Zhao Qian's work dates to the late eighth century as well. The lineages advanced by Amoghavajra's disciples are notable as they emphasize a single transmission and use language associated with the early "transmission of the lamp" genre that emerged in eighth-century metropolitan Chan circles.

Thus it seems likely that the appearance of exclusive lineage claims—*zong* in its stronger sense—is best understood as a form of jockeying for patronage between advocates of the Yoga Teaching and Chan proponents in the metropolitan context at the end of the eighth century.[119] Such claims had already been circulating for decades in the *Annals of the Transmission of the Dharma Treasure* (*Chuan fabao ji* 傳法寶紀 T 2838) and the *Record of Teachers and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra* (*Lengqie shizi ji* 楞伽師資記 T 2837).[120] Further, by the time the comments above were written a version of the *Platform sūtra* (*Liuzu tan jing* 六祖壇經) and the *Record of the Dharma Jewel through the Ages* (*Lidai fabao ji* 曆代法寶記 T 2075) were also promoting a unilinear and very partisan picture of the Chan transmission.[121] Indeed, we might go further and think about the structure of these early Chan genealogical works and their relationship to the "Record of Activity" (*Xingzhuang* 行狀) genre and even a work like Feixi's stele biography of Amoghavajra. Unlike the Chan genealogies they do not record in depth the teachings of the various lineage masters. They do, however, set out a teaching lineage, often with anecdotes concerning the master and his teacher, like the one about Vajrabodhi cited above.

In this respect (and in some others I will discuss below) these late eighth century geneaologies bear witness to the emergence of a distinctively Chinese adaptations of Indian Esoteric Buddhism. Its inspiration may not be too difficult to discern. John Jorgensen has

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[118] The mention of the lineage by Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, and Kūkai makes its use quite plausible. Further, the story of the Iron Stūpa is replicated in each initiation, and is thus quite central to the ritual tradition.

[119] And this, of course, was a part of a widespread phenomenon involving appeals to lineage as claims to social status.

[120] See McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, 8-9. *Chuan fabao ji* dates from the first quarter of the eighth century while *Lengqie shizi ji* is probably no later that the early 740s.

[121] The last monk treated in *Lidai fabao ji* died in 775 and the text is generally dated to around 780. The *Platform sutra*, now thought to have been composed by members of the Ox-head faction, dates from the last third of the eight century. See McRae, *The Northern School,* 240-42, and his "The Ox-head School of Chinese Buddhism: From Early Ch'an to the Golden Age," 169-253.

noted the structural similarities between eighth-century Chan lineage constructions and conventional funerary practices and their attendant ancestral halls. John McRae, building on Jorgensen, ventures that "the proliferation of Chan lineages mimics that of conventional family genealogies, creating a parallel realm of filiation between living and dead … each individual practitioner is securely placed within a generational succession, and all of those successive relationships are concatenated into a massive network of interlocking identities."[122] McRae, taking a cue from the work of Nancy Jay, goes on to suggest that the construction of such networks functions as an "old boy" network that serves both to include disciples in a ready-made set of social connections and to exclude those outside the network. Indeed, the theorist Bruce Lincoln has demonstrated the way such "ancestral invocations" are tools for the manipulation of social structure that may be used simultaneously to construct certain social groupings while attempting to marginalize others.[123]

I pose the question this way—what is the ideological work of a unilinear transmission sequence like that presented by Zhao Qian, Yan Ying, the transmission of the lamp genre of Chan texts, or, for that matter, familial lineage constructions based on distant focal ancestors? In each case we see a structure composed of a founder, followed by a unique and singular transmission in each generation, followed by a sudden branching in the present or recent past into multiple lines.[124] The unilinear portion or "trunk"—if we think of it using the common metaphor of a tree—resembles an idealized and extreme form of patriarchal succession. Here one patriarch or grandfather (*zu* 祖) is followed by another. But the "branches" are as essential as the trunk and are often overlooked by analysts. The dense network of branching filiations *in the recent past or present is the point of the whole construction*. Constructed backwards from the present, the work of these lineages is two-fold: first, they monopolize power and authority in the present by cutting off multiple access points from the past. (In this way, they call to mind the popular 1980s Arnold Schwarzenegger science fiction "Terminator" films, in which an android assassin is sent from the future into the past to eliminate certain historical lines of development.) Second, they channel relationships and claims of authority in the present among the various legitimate competing "branches" by situating them in hierarchies based on filiation. Thus, the lineage claims in Chan, among Amoghavajra's disciples, and more broadly in elite Chinese families of the time represent an emerging strategy for adjudicating status, authority, power, and patronage. Zanning's lament concerning the branching of the Yoga lineage, that 多則多矣 而少驗者何 "Though they are many in number, I wonder why so little effect has been shown?" displays exactly the kind of obfuscating

[122] McRae, *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*, 148. Jorgensen's work is "The Imperial Lineage of Ch'an Buddhism: the Role of Confucian Ritual and Ancestor Worship in Ch'an's Search for Legitimation in the Mid-T'ang Dynasty" Also Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*.

[123] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, especially "Ancestral Invocations and Segmentary Lineages," 18-20.

[124] There is a shift over time from the Tang to the Song that places more emphasis on multi-branched patterns of transmission. See Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," 152.

nostalgia that the construct is designed to cultivate. This is the elevation of the founders in the "trunk" while the real work of the "branches"—the development of hierarchies for accessing power and patronage—goes on unnoticed (Zanning also has another agenda in this regard, which I take up below).

As far as I can ascertain, Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra understood authority in terms of access to and mastery of (*chengjiu* 成就, Sanskrit *siddhi,*) the most advanced teachings (i.e., those of the STTS) through *abhiṣeka*. The lack of a transmission lineage between the "great worthy" who recovered the teachings of the Diamond Realm and Vajrabodhi who introduced them to China underscores the (at least theoretical) availability of these teachings through initiation. Nevertheless the Esoteric Buddhism of Amoghavajra was highly sensitive to elite patronage as well. Exclusive lineage claims in such a situation could be a powerful new tool for advancement. Perhaps a fear of just such developments prompted Amoghavajra expressly to forbid his students to set up a portrait hall after his death.[125]

Whatever Amoghavajra's understanding of lineage may have been, and despite his clearly expressed wishes, some of his disciples conceived of themselves as belonging to a distinct and exclusive lineage, a lineage similar to those being advanced by the partisans of Chan. But it is also important to note how these lineages are different from those being promoted in Chan circles. A great deal of intellectual effort was expended on the inconsistencies in the long lines of transmission from Śākyamuni to Bodhidharma. The imperative was to show that Śākyamuni's "mind transmission" had not been cut off before it ever reached China, and that meant sorting out a variety of problems in the texts dealing with the early order in India, as well as its rather sketchy history over many centuries. Mistakes here—and there were a number—were seized upon by opponents.[126] In light of this, Zhao Qian's statement, "As if a single house, the legitimate disciples continued in succession with my master as the sixth to receive it" makes a virtue of its obvious historical implausibility. Indeed, he specifies that nearly a thousand years go by before Nāgārjuna meets and transmits the teachings to Nāgabodhi! Aside from putting into play a long held belief in the great longevity of Nāgārjuna, Zhao Qian makes plain the fundamentally different nature of this transmission from that of any other Buddhist group. This doctrine was not preached by Śākyamuni. It is the teaching of

[125] T 2120 52.845a11:毘 取灰加持便即散卻亦不得立其靈机圖寫吾形 Zanning mentions portrait halls for monks associated with Pure Land and Tiantai teachings during the Tang in his biography of the monk Shaokang 少康 T 50 867b28. Portrait halls for both Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra are mentioned in *Quan Tang wen*, 506 12a-13a. For the function of portrait halls in Chan see Foulk and Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China, " 149-219. The funerary connection may be even deeper. Post-Tang Buddhism became progressively invested both in lineage and in rituals for the dead. These latter, were the result of a wedding of pre-esoteric rituals for ancestors and "Yoga" rites for ancestors initiated by Amoghavajra and elaborated thereafter.

[126] Although it has been superceded by more recent research, Yampolsky's *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* still has some value in its discussion of the problems inherent in the fabrication of a rationally defensible Chan genealogy linking the seven Buddhas of the past with Bodhidharma. See especially 38-50. See also McRae, *The Northern School,* 73-90, and Foulk, "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an," 220-294.

Mahāvairocana and is revealed by Vajrasattva when a disciple enters the "Iron Stūpa" of the mandala for initiation.[127]

At this point several things are clear. First, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, and probably the first generation of Amoghavajra's disciples understood themselves as initiates of a special tradition, the "Yoga." Second, this tradition was closely tied to the STTS and its cycle of texts, deities and practices, with a distinctive pattern of initiation and ritual performance. As is evident from the work of Buddhaguhya and others, the STTS based "Yoga" is part of a taxonomy that in India and Tibet distinguishes *Kriyā* from and Yoga Tantra.[128] Third, this "Great Teaching of Yoga" is a phenomenon of the Tang and is not an exegetical invention of Zanning in the Song. Fourth, Amoghavajra garnered considerable institutional support for this tradition, its initiates, and its practices, especially those involving the protection of the State. Fifth, while full initiation into the Yoga was tightly restricted, the teachings of these masters was not limited solely to those materials of the STTS. Indeed, it is clear that Amoghavajra taught not only from other recently imported Esoteric texts, but that he also promoted the Mahāyāna and considered it fully compatible with the Yoga. There is no indication that he sought to establish a new "sect." Sixth, though the term "esoteric" takes on added weight (the "three esoterica" etc.) in this dispensation its use constitutes an extension of already existing patterns of use in Chinese Buddhism. Seventh, Tang evidence vividly illustrates the construction of Chan-like genealogies in the late-eighth century, especially by Amoghavajra's lay disciples. These genealogies are striking evidence of indigenous appropriation and adaptation of the teachings.

Zanning, The "Wheel of Instruction and Command," and Esoteric Buddhism

The context of the "Yoga" is the mid-Tang, and we see with Amoghavajra the adaptation of the ritual program of the STTS to the precarious circumstances of the Tang court after the defeat of An Lushan.[129] But the translation and assimilation of the Tantras in China had only begun, and we see in the lineage constructions of Yan Ying and Zhao Qian one aspect of indigenous development. I turn now to Zanning (919-1001), so that we can examine his

[127] Although a number of texts affirm the identity of Śākyamuni and Vairocana, the Yoga teaching asserts immediate access to that teaching through initiation.

[128] That Amoghavajra saw the "Yoga" as a part of a larger textual and taxonomic corpus is confirmed in his *Jin'gangding jing yuqie shibahui zhigui* 金剛頂經瑜伽十八會指軌 T 869 which provides an outline of the teaching. Giebel has provided an annotated translation (1995). The nature of this broader teaching was taken up by Eastman in "The Eighteen Tantras." As Dalton, "A Crisis of Doxography" indicates, several taxonomies emerged in the eighth and ninth centuries, though none of them were the "standard" four-fold one so often cited as normative today.

[129] For compact yet detailed treatments of the political situation in the wake of the rebellion see Peterson, "Court and Province in mid- and late T'ang," 464-560, and Dalby, "Court politics in late T'ang times," 561-681.

understanding of the "Great Teaching of Yoga" and how he integrated it into his vision of Buddhism, a Buddhism not of the eighth, but very much of the tenth century. What of his characterization of "Esoteric Buddhism" and the "Wheel of Instruction and Command"? What was the context of Zanning's pronouncements?

Between the death of the Tang emperor Daizong 代宗 in 779 and Taizong's 太宗 (r. 976-997) invitation of Zanning to the Northern Song court a lot had changed. The persecution of Buddhism during the reign of Tang emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 841-846) coupled with centrifugal forces for regional autonomy and the growing independence of governors and warlords in the late eight and ninth centuries led to the collapse of the Tang and a period of smaller regional kingdoms. The same forces that gave rise to the persecution of Buddhism continued through the period and were to emerge as a prominent feature of the religious and political landscape of tenth and eleventh century China. Dubbed the "Ancient Culture" movement (*guwen* 古文) it would see the emergence of a revitalized Confucianism.[130] At the same time, various groups emerging from the mid-Tang onward and claiming the moniker Chan 禪 were growing in prominence and diversity. By the time of Zanning there was already considerable controversy concerning the relationship between Chan and the various Buddhist "Teachings" based on the scriptures.[131] Certain regions, such as the Wuyue area 吳越國 (893-978) from which Zanning hailed were dominated by synthetic movements that saw a harmony between the scriptures and Chan. Others, such as the area now in Sichuan, were dominated by more radical thinkers who rejected such syntheses.[132]

Buddhist secondary sources tout Zanning as the "Tiger of the Vinaya," for his authorship of the *Lives of Eminent Monks*, for his achievements as the government appointed head of the monastic order, and for his literary style and accomplishments. As a learned and articulate monk from the Wuyue area in the Latter Tang dynasty, Zanning was interviewed by the Song emperor Taizong who was so impressed that he awarded him a purple robe and an honorific title. Zanning was soon commissioned to write the *Lives of Eminent Monks* (982), the only such monastic collection executed under imperial order. Zanning's nickname indicates his reputation for great learning in the area of the Buddhist discipline—something he assiduously promoted both individually and as an area of government concern. Further, both his involvement with translation and with the discipline would appear to have aligned Zanning with the "Teachings" faction in a Chinese Buddhist world edging toward bifurcation into "Chan" versus "Teachings" camps. Indeed, Zanning's *Lives* and his *Outline of Clerical History* (*Da Song seng shilue* 大宋僧史略 T 2126) commissioned in 998 reflect an understanding of Buddhism colored by his Wuyue roots and conditioned by the sense that the Buddhist teachings had very much become a fully domesticated part of Chinese culture. Further, Zanning was heir to a position tracing itself at least to the Tang thinker Zongmi 宗密

130 For an overview of the "wen" movement see Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China*.

131 For an introduction to Zongmi's take on the issue—a view that had influence on Zanning—see Gregory, *Tsung-mi*, 224-230.

132 See Gregory, *Tsung-mi*, 18-19, 247-49.

(780-841) that the Teachings and Chan were cut from a single cloth.[133]

Just as he sought to encompass all forms of Buddhism, Zanning also sought the compatibility of Buddhism with Daoist and Ruist traditions. Though it may seem ironic now, Zanning was intimately involved in the *guwen* debates and movements from which a renewed, strongly nativistic and often anti-Buddhist Ruist 儒 (Confucian) vanguard emerged. As Albert Welter has argued, Zanning proposed an alternative interpretation of *wen* which included Chinese Buddhism, along with Ruist and Daoist culture as *fully* Chinese. At a time when influential figures in the early *guwen* movement such as Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954-1001) and Liu Kai 柳開 (954-1000) were attacking Buddhism as "parasitic," these same figures valued Zanning's friendship. Indeed, Wang wrote a preface to Zanning's collected works.[134]

A look at *Lives* and at *Outline of Clerical History* tells part of the tale: Zanning was not only vastly learned in traditional Chinese classical literature, but he was also a respected stylist. In an honor unusual for a Buddhist, Zanning was appointed to the Hanlin Academy. In a way, Zanning was a bridge-maker. He promoted Buddhism both to the emperor and to *guwen* proponents as an integral and indispensable tool for Chinese imperial rule and for the flourishing of a truly great culture. In that pursuit Zanning argued for the antiquity of Buddhism in China in terms that *guwen* thinkers might find acceptable while simultaneously arguing that the Chinese version of Buddhism represented a refined and perfected version of the tradition as a result of its long Chinese habitus.[135]

The first three Song emperors sought to put the conquest behind them and consolidate their rule on the basis not of martial power (*wu* 武) but on the basis of civilizing virtue (*wen* 文). Obviously taking the culture heroes of the Zhou 周 as models they set about generously patronizing religion (including both Daoism and Buddhism), literature, and the arts.

Two great Buddhist projects are significant with regard to understanding Zanning. First, Taizu 太祖 (r. 960-976) sent missions to South and Central Asia. Initial feelers led to the dispatch of 157 monks to collect texts—texts that would become the fuel for an imperially sponsored translation bureau and for the first full printing of the Buddhist scriptures. The printed canon, referred to as the Kaibao canon (first edition, Chengdu, 983) after the reign period in which it appeared, comprised some 130,000 woodblocks. Once printing of the canon commenced a special building was constructed for that purpose. Taizu's successor Taizong institutionalized the project by founding the Institute for Canonical Translation (*yijing yuan* 譯經院) in 980.[136] Shortly thereafter the Court received four Indian monks, Dharmapāla 法護

[133] For an introduction to the life and thought of Zongmi see Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*. A good example of Zongmi's position is found on 77-79.

[134] Welter's "A Buddhist Response to the Confucian Revival: Tsan-ning and the Debate Over *Wen* in the Early Sung" lays out the issues with exceptional clarity. Liu Kai's biography is in *Song shi* 440.13,023-13,028. Wang's biography is in *Song shi* 293.9793-9800.

[135] Welter's discussion of these issues in "A Buddhist Response to the Confucian Revival," is on 33-47.

[136] The best available work on the Northern Song's great Buddhist projects is by Huang, "Imperial Rulership and Buddhism in the Early Northern Sung," esp. his treatment of the Institute and of the

(963-1058), Devaśāntika (?) 天息災(d. 1000), Dānapāla 施護(fl. 970s), and Dharmabhadra 法賢 (d. 1001).[137] The last two became among the most prolific translators in Chinese history, each accounting for well over 100 translations. For the project Taizong constructed a special building comprising three offices and support structures in the Taiping xingguo 太平興國 temple.[138] Completed in 982 the institute was to survive for 100 years until 1082.[139] In addition to translations of newly imported scriptures a dragnet was set up to scour monastery libraries for Sanskrit manuscripts to be translated.

It is no surprise, given the time period, that much of what was translated was Esoteric. Indeed, the range of Esoteric texts included the new full translation of the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* (Dānapāla T 882), the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Devaśāntika T 1191), the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* (Dānapāla T 885), the *Hevajra ḍākinījālasaṃvara-tantra* (Dharmapāla T 892), as well as assorted ritual manuals for the worship of the likes of Vināyaka (Dharmabhadra T 1272) and Mārīcī (Devaśāntika T 1257).[140]

Scholars have often conceptualized changes that took place in Chinese Buddhism between the Tang and the Song as a result of the decadence and decline of Buddhism in South Asia and the drying up of new scriptures and missionaries. While the changes in South Asia cannot be ignored, I think the driving cultural logic in this case was domestic, not foreign. The Song government's two epochal projects, to create the first printed canon (Chengdu, 982) and

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Canon project on pages 149-58; and Sen, "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 27-80.

[137] A solid account of the work of these translators was published by Jan in two parts as "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China," in *History of Religions,* vol. 6 number 1 and number 2. Despite the great detail in the account, the brief conclusion leaves many questions unanswered. See 139-144. There is still confusion regarding the identity of two of the translators—specifically whether Fatian was renamed Faxian or whether Tianxizai was renamed Faxian. Jan takes up the issue on 34-37. Although Sen, 43ff. treats the name confusion as solved, the confusion is early and is anything but resolved.

[138] A description of the building and the process of translation can be found in *Fozu tongji* , chuan 43-44 (T 2035). Sen presents a translation in "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 35-36.

[139] An English overview of these materials is available in Huang, "Imperial Buddhism and Rulership in the Early Northern Song," 144-187.

[140] In "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty" Sen rightly underscores the centralized and political role of the Institute and its projects, especially as these relate to diplomacy. However, like Jan, Sen repeats the assertion that "a majority of Song translations are short esoteric *dhāraṇīs* that follow a fixed template." (54) Sen, like Jan, sees a lack of commentary as evidence that the new translations had little or no impact, and it is certainly true that Chinese Buddhism was, by the Song, dominated by its own discourses. But we should not lose sight of the fact that most of the texts in question were ritual manuals and not doctrinal treatises. Holding up a commentarial tradition as an indice of significance skews our inquiry in favor of a certain kind of intellectual tradition, and this may lead us to miss the impact of Esoteric Buddhism in ritual and iconography. By my count, *excluding* short *dhāraṇī* texts, esoteric texts accounted for over fifty percent of the four major translators' output, and a number of these texts were quite substantial.

the establishment of the Institute for Canonical Translation (*Yijing yuan*) were designed to replace India with China. By importing texts and translators, by scouring the empire for Sanskrit texts, and by setting up a factory-like production line for translation and printing, the Song turned itself into the source of the Dharma. This strategy paid off, as the printed canon and new translations coming out of the Institute played a major role in state to state diplomacy on the continent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is the heady context during which Zanning was invited to court, was honored by the emperor, was commissioned to write the *Lives of Eminent Monks* and rose to become the leader of the sangha.[141]

While Zanning's involvement with Chan and Vinaya is well known, what is less well known is just how deeply colored Zanning's (and his contemporaries') Buddhism was by Esoteric scriptures, ideas, and practices. Indeed, Zanning's interest in translation, in Chan, and in Esoteric Buddhism reflected a triadic vision of Buddhism that was likely shared by many of his time. His characterization of the Dharma as composed of "Exoteric," "Esoteric," and "Chan" teachings clearly emerges in the section on "translators" in the *Lives of Eminent Monks Composed in the Song.*

At the head of the first *zhuan* of *Lives of Eminent Monks*, and thus at the head of the work as a whole stands the biography of Yijing 義淨 (635-713), the great pilgrim and translator who spent some 20 years studying at Nālandā. The choice of Yijing makes sense for two reasons: he was a major translator of Vinaya literature (something close to Zanning's heart) and an early importer and translator of Esoteric texts (most notably the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī sūtra*).[142] Yijing's biography is followed by a summary comment of the sort typical in Chinese historical works. The *zhuan* is filled out by a biography of Vajrabodhi and a biography of Amoghavajra (with passing reference to Amoghavajra's successor Huilang). The two biographies are followed by the summary comment cited above that begins, "Among those who promulgated the Wheel of Instruction and Command (*jiaoling lun* 教令輪) in China, Vajrabodhi is regarded as the first patriarch (*shizu* 始祖) Amoghavajra the second (*erzu* 二祖), and Huilang the third (*sanzu* 三祖)."[143] What is this "Wheel of Instruction and Command," where does Zanning get it, and how is he using it?

Buddhism has a rich store of metaphors related to the various "turnings" or setting in

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[141] Welter, "A Buddhist Response," 30.

[142] There are four translations of the text listed in the Taishō previous to Yijing's translation (T 19 985). The first translation is attributed to Kumārajīva (T 19 988), there are two anonymous fourth century translations (T nos. 986-987), and a translation by Saṁghabara (T 19 984). Amoghavajra translated the text for the sixth and last time (T 982). The Kumārajīva attribution given in Fei Changfang's unreliable *Lidai sanbao ji* is almost certainly false. Lü Jianfu regards it as a Liang production. See *Zhongguo mijiao shi* 124-125. A forthcoming study of the early translations of the scripture by Sørensen "The Spell of the Great, Golden Peacock Queen," points out that the Kumārajīva version does not appear in *Chu sanzang jiji* and appears to be a pastiche with a Indic core and additional Chinese pieces. The versions of Yijing and Amoghavajra are closest to the Sanskrit versions. See *Bukkyō daijiten* 667b-668b. A romanized Sanskrit edition was published by Takubo Shūyo, *Aryā-mahā-māyūrī-vidyā-rājñī* in 1972.

[143] T 2061 50.724b21.

motion of various "wheels." The metaphor probably has roots in the ideology of kingship and the "wheel" of the Cakravartin, but it was quickly extended to indicate schemes involving various dispensations. Thus we see the turning of the wheel that results in the Śrāvakayāna, the Pratyekabuddhayāna, the Mahāyāna, and so on. As was the case with the "Great Teaching of Yoga," Zanning did not coin the term *jiaoling lun*; Amoghavajra apparently did, though Zanning uses it for his own purposes. To understand Zanning's use we must briefly look back at the term in its earlier setting.

The term *jiaoling* 教令 is fairly common in Chinese Buddhist texts. As a translation of the Sanskrit *anuśāsanī* it simply means teaching, instruction, or command.[144] *Jiaoling lun*, however, is exceedingly rare, occurring only twenty-six times in the Taishō canon. It first appears in six works attributed to Amoghavajra, including his *Instructions for the Rites, Chants, and Meditations of the Prajñāpāramitā Dhāraṇī Scripture for Humane Kings Who Wish to Protect Their States*[145] and his commentary on the *Adhyardhaśatikā-prajñāpārmitā sūtra* or so-called "Tantric" *Prajñāpārmitā* in 150 verses.[146] It also figures in Amoghavajra's disciple Liangbi's *Commentary on the Scripture for Humane Kings* (T 1709), and in a manual on offerings to the Eighteen Deva-Protectors by his disciple Faquan 法全 (T 1295).[147] All are from the same period and the "Yoga" tradition. The remaining handful of references by Zanning and others are few, and all derive from the Tang sources.[148]

The principle commentary on the performance of the rites associated with Amoghavajra's new recension of the *Scripture for Humane Kings* (T246) is *Instructions*. It presents itself as based on the oral commentary of Amoghavajra. Its opening passages set out a taxonomy of "Wheels" and related bodily manifestations of the Buddhas:

> According to the Sanskrit text of the Yoga of the Summit of the Vajra (the STTS) in the possession of Tripitaka … the five bodhisattvas manifest bodies differentiated in accord with two kinds of wheel (*cakra*). In the first—the Wheel of the Teaching (*falun* 法輪)—bodhisattvas manifest their bodies of truth (*zhenshi shen* 眞實身) because it is the body received as recompense for the practice of vows. In the second—the Wheel of Instruction and Command (*jiaolinglun* 教令輪)—[they]

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[144] For instance, to "receive the Buddha's instruction" (*shoufo jiaoling* 受佛教令, T 125 2.649a17) or "received the King's command" (*shouwang jiaoling* 受王教令, T 423 13.970b9).

[145] *Renwang huguo panropoluomiduo jing toluoni niansong yigui* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經陀羅尼念誦儀軌, T 994, 19.514a-519b. For the *Scripture for Humane* Kings and Amoghavajra's commentaries see Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom es*pecially 174-191.

[146] The *Adhyardhaśatikā-prajñāpārmitā-sūtra* (*Dale jin'gang bukong zhenshi sanmoye jing* 大樂金剛不空眞實三麼耶經) is T 243 while Amoghavajra's commentary is T1003. The text and Amoghavajra's commentary are still very much a part of the Shingon tradition in Japan. For a full study see Astley-Kristensen, *The Rishukyō* (1991).

[147] It appears in a text dedicated to the *vidyārājas* as a group (T 1072), three related texts on extending life (T 1133, 1134A, 1134B), and a text to Amṛtakuṇḍalin *vidyārāja* (T 1211).

[148] The remaining references are in T 2061, 2129, and 2163.

display their bodies of wrath (*weinü shen* 威怒身) because it is the body which, arising from Great Compassion, manifests as anger.[149]

Amoghavajra presents a similar explanation in his commentary on his translation of the *Prajñāpārmitā* in 150 verses.[150] In both *Instructions* and in Liangbi's *Commentary* the associations of the various deities are then set out, including the various *vidyārājas*. Indeed, this analysis fairly represents an essential feature of the Yoga Tantra and the Vajrayāna more generally—that the deities manifest in two forms, as beneficent preachers of the Dharma and as wrathful enforcers of the Dharma. The latter are the well known *vidyārāja*-protectors. It is plain from a survey of all of the primary sources and from the secondary sources on the topic that *jiaoling lun always* refers to the wrathful forms of the deities. To translate the phrase as "Wheel of the Teaching" or Wheel of Instruction" would miss the mark.[151]

Although terms like "Wheel of the Correct Dharma" (*zhengfa lun* 正法輪) are direct translations of Sanskrit terms and are ubiquitous in Chinese Buddhism, and while this "wheel" scheme is clearly *founded* on the STTS, it is notable that the precise vocabulary (*jiaoling lun*) *is not to be found in any of the translations of the* STTS and represents a distinctive and logical Chinese shorthand on the part of Amoghavajra for discussing the Indian system.[152]

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[149] T 994 19.514a23-27. Amoghavajra's disciple Liangbi makes exactly the same associations in almost exactly the same language. "The five bodhisattvas manifest bodies of different kind in accord with the two types of wheel. The first—which [corresponds to] the Teaching-wheel—manifests the reality body (*zhenshi shen*), the body attained as recompense for the cultivation of vows. The second—which [corresponds to] the Command-wheel—displays the wrathful body, the body which, aroused through great compassion, manifests ferocity. T 1709 33.515c22-25. A third term, the "Wheel body of the Self-nature" (*Zixing lun shen* 自性輪身), appears in two other texts attributed to Amoghavajra (T 1067 and T 1205) but neither text appears in contemporaneous catalogues and thus both may date from later periods and represent further indigenous and possibly Japanese elaborations of the scheme.

[150] He explains that when Vairocana Buddha "turns the Wheel" in the Adamantine Palace on the summit of Sumeru, "the wheels are of four kinds, what are referred to as Vajra wheel, Ratna wheel, Dharma wheel, and Karma wheel. These four wheels are subsumed in two wheels which are called the Wheel of the Correct Teaching and the Wheel of Instruction and Command. Now it was Vairocana who manifested himself in Jambudvīpa and attained Buddhahood to save all heterodox [practitioners]. Thus on the summit of Sumeru he manifested his awesome wrathful form." T 1003 19.611b14-18 毘盧遮那佛轉輪 輪有四種 所謂金剛輪寶輪法輪羯磨輪其四輪皆攝在二輪中所謂正法輪教令輪即彼毘盧遮那於閻浮提化相成佛度諸外道即於須彌頂示現威猛忿怒形.

[151] While it would convey the sense of instruction by an *ācārya* it would lose the sense of enforcement or chastisement present in all of its uses. It would also leave little to differentiate it from the "Wheel of the Teaching" 法輪. Astley Kristensen in one instance advocates translating *lun* causatively as "Wheel Which Brings About the Teaching." *The Rishukyō*, 136 note 7. Encyclopedia entries are *Mikkyō daijiten 844a-c,* and *Bukkyō daijiten* 623a, 1315b, and 1857c-1858a. Yoritomi, *Chugoku mikkyō* discusses this on pages 144-145.

[152] All uses of the term are traceable to Amoghavajra's lineage. Kiyota *Shingon Buddhism*, 162 offers "*ādeśanācakrakāya* (compassion through anger)" but gives no source, and I find neither it nor *anuśāsanīcakra* in the STTS. A key feature of the text is the role of the heads of the five families as

Zanning's use of the term can hardly have been accidental, though the way he uses it is remarkably subtle.

> Now, as for the Teaching—without particular order—there are three varieties. The first is the Exoteric Teaching (*xianjiao* 顯教), which is the Vinaya, Sūtra, and Abhidharma of all the vehicles (this is not the same as the Teaching of Exoteric Understanding of the *Yogācārabhūmi* which is for the most part Mahāyāna Teaching). The second is the Esoteric Teaching (*mijiao* 密教), which is the method of Yoga: the *abhiṣeka* of the five divisions, the *homa*, the three secrets, and the methods for the mandala (the Yoga Hidden Esoteric Teaching is for the most part a Śrāvakayāna Teaching). The third is the Mind Teaching (*xinjiao* 心教), which is the method of Chan: the direct pointing at the human mind, seeing one's nature and attaining Buddhahood. The first of these is the Wheel of the Teaching (*falun* 法輪), this then is the Exoteric Teaching. It takes Kāśyapa Mātaṅga as the first patriarch. The second is the Wheel of Instruction and Command (*jiaoling lun* 教令輪), this then is the Esoteric Teaching. It regards Vajrabodhi as its first patriarch. The third is the Wheel of Mind (*xinlun* 心輪) (I have adopted this Wheel), this then is the Teaching of Chan. It regards Bodhidharma as the first patriarch. Therefore, those who transmit the Wheel of the Teaching use the sound of the Teaching to transmit the sound of the Teaching (*yi fayin chuan fayin* 以法音傳法音). Those who transmit the Wheel of Instruction and Command use the esoterica to transmit the esoterica (*yi mimi chuan mimi* 以祕密傳祕密), and those who transmit the Wheel of Mind use the mind to transmit the mind (*yi xin chuan xin* 以心傳心). These are the three Wheels of the Three Teachings, whose three patriarchs came from the West to the East. [153]

Zanning's use of the term *jiaoling lun* in this passage foregrounds the *method of transmission*: Preaching of the scriptures, secret instruction by an *ācārya*, and mind to mind in Chan. But there is more going on than first meets the eye. It is obvious that Zanning has borrowed the term from Amoghavajra. He has, after all, written a biography of him. This remarkable taxonomy comes near the end of Zanning's discussion on the history and nature of the translation of Buddhist Scriptures that closes the first section of the *Lives of Eminent Monks*. Why did Zanning choose to embed this manifesto on Buddhism here?

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cakravartin 轉輪王 and their generation of ferocious forms. The generation of the mandala follows a pattern whereby each divinity is externalized, mounts a lunar or solar disk, *and requests instruction*. Vajrabodhi and Dānapāla translate *jiaoshi* 教示 at this point while Amoghavajra uses *jiaoling*. The Sanskrit (from the sequence on Vajrateja) reads: "atha sa Vimalatejamahābodhisatvakāo bhagavato ḥrdayād avatirya, sarvatathāgatānāṃ dakṣiṇacandramaṇḍalāśrito bhūtvā, punar apy ājñāṃ mārgayām āsa." Yamada, *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṅgraha nāma mahāyāna-sūtra,* 22. Reading *ājñā* as "command," Amoghavajra appears to have constructed *jiaoling lun* to represent these ferocious manifestations on the analogy of *saddharmacakra*.

[153] T 2061 50. 724b16-26. The parenthetical comments in this passage are in the original.

Zanning's discussion is a tight but nonetheless comprehensive and highly sophisticated discourse on the vagaries of translation, one which takes full cognizance of the linguistic differences between Sanskrit and Classical Chinese as well as of local dialects and intermediate languages. He begins with a highly allusive flourish designed to underscore the difficulty of transmitting the Dharma and the indispensable requirement of sagacity in approaching it, for "sages and worthies drink of it and find strong wine, while for the inferior who imbibe it, it is the dregs."[154] He then begins a catalogue of what can go wrong. Invoking Dao'an he then sets out and discusses in detail a six-fold rubric for avoiding major pitfalls in the translation of scripture. Two thirds of the way through his essay he posits the three sorts of teaching that I have discussed above. In the last quarter of the essay he brings the history of translation up to the present, from the late Tang, and discusses imperial patronage of "the śramana Fajin who transmitted esoteric and exoteric teachings" (*chuan xian mi jiao shamen fajin* 傳顯密教沙門法進) and who was instrumental in introducing to the court the monk Dharmadeva 法天 and setting in motion the establishment of the Institute for Canonical Translation (*yijing yuan* 譯經院).[155] Dharmadeva was soon joined by Devaśāntika (?) 天息災 (d. 1000) and Dānapāla 施護(fl. 970s).[156] In these things the court "may be favorably compared with those of previous eras."[157] Zanning, underscoring the comparison with the Tang, then returns to Yijing, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, and others treated at the beginning of the translators section. He concludes,

> The basis of the Buddhist Teaching is translation, and when the basis is established then the Dao is given birth. What is born of this Dao are Buddhists, and thus these take these pages as their head. Therefore, it is said that "When the former kings wished to sacrifice to the ocean, they must previously have done so to the river." This exemplifies that one cannot forget what is basic.[158]

The analogy evokes the world of the classical Confucian kings and the import is plain: The scriptures are basic, just as local sacrifices in a Confucian world are the basis of the larger order. At the same time it is interesting to note what Zanning chose not to do. He does not divide Buddhism into Chan, Pure Land, and Teachings, or some other taxonomy that we might have expected. Buddhism, he tells us is comprised of the "Exoteric" the "Esoteric" and the "Mind" Teachings. What's more, this brief history of translation is tightly tied to the activities of the Song Institute for Canonical Translation and to the Tang Yoga tradition. Yoritomi is correct to point out that there is a congruence between Zanning's wheel scheme and his promotion of the three religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism) as necessary to

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[154] T 2061 50.723a15-16.

[155] T 2061 50.725a04.

[156] For an account of these monks see Jan, "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China," 34-37, and Huang, "Imperial Rulership and Buddhism in the Early Northern Sung," 149-158.

[157] T 2061 50.725a19.

[158] T 2061 50. 725b7-8.

the government of the sage.[159] Just as all three religions are necessary, so too, all three elements of Buddhism have a crucial role to play in supporting the government of the sage-king. This vision finds a likely source in the "Great Teaching of Yoga" and in Wuyue Buddhism. But—and this is important—it primarily reflects Zanning's ideological stance rather that that of the "Great Teaching of Yoga" or of the more recent imports being provided by Dharmabhadra and the monks of the Institute for Canonical Translation.

First, Zanning has read Amoghavajra carefully and has imbibed the lessons of Yuan Zhao's *Biaozhi ji* that the Yoga Teaching can be a crucial to the defense of the State. He even echoes the rhetoric of Amoghavajra's version of the *Scripture for Humane Kings*, using its statement that "the Teaching has been entrusted to Kings and Officials" as support for his vision of Buddhism as an integral part of the imperial tool-kit.[160]

Second, unlike the Linji Chan that would emerge later in the eleventh century and champion a Chan literary style focused on the deeds of Chinese "patriarchs" and divorced from "alien" Buddhist scriptures ("a teaching outside of the scriptures"), Wuyue Chan, following prominent earlier thinkers like Zongmi, sought to embrace the various strands of Buddhism emerging from the late Tang. Indeed, Zanning's statement, "to use mind to transmit mind" is a quotation from Zongmi's *Preface to the Collected Writings on the Source of Chan* written in 833.[161] And Zongmi's use of the phrase is in conjunction with one of the earliest uses of what would become a Chan slogan, "he" [referring to Bodhidharma] "transmitted mind by means of mind without setting up scriptures"(*yi xin chuan xin buli wenzi* 以心傳心不立文子)[162]

Like Zanning, Zongmi took pains to refute the notion that this statement meant the abandonment of scripture, and elsewhere in the *Preface* he appeals to the *tri-karma* metaphor to make his point: "the sūtras are the Buddha's words, and Chan is the Buddha's meaning. The mind and speech of the Buddha cannot be at odds."[163] Zanning's three wheels hermeneutic is an ingenious application of the *tri-karma* metaphor—a metaphor important in Esoteric practice and ideology as well as in Chan. In terms used by metaphor theorists, the real power of this metaphor lies in its entailments, those unspoken but implied pieces of metaphorical baggage that work behind the scenes.[164]

The apparent simplicity of Zanning's metaphor belies its unspoken complexity. If the Sūtras, Vinaya, and Abhidharma (the Dharma-Wheel) represent the teaching transmitted by

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[159] Yoritomi, *Chūgoku Mikkyō no kenkyū,* 143-144.

[160] See Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 198-205; 265-266 translating T 246 8.43a9.

[161] *Chanyuan zhuchuanji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序 T 2015 48.400b19-20.

[162] See Foulk, "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an," 234. The first extant version of this statement occurs in a work contemporaneous with Zongmi and attributed to Bodhidharma titled *Xuemo lun* 血脈論 (T 2009 48.373b13-14): 前佛後佛以心傳心 不立文字.

[163] Foulk, "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an," 235. The original is T 2015 48.400b10-11: 經是佛語 禪是佛意 諸佛心口必不相違.

[164] For a brief introduction to conceptual metaphor theory see Johnson and Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By.* For more recent and in-depth treatments see the bibliography in Johnson, and Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*.

"sound" (*yin*), and Chan (the Mind-Wheel) represents the teaching transmitted by "mind" (*xin*), then what is the Wheel of Instruction and Command? The most straightforward translation of the phrase *yi mi chuan mi* would be "using what is secret to transmit what is secret." But recall, that in this *tri-karma* formulation Zanning evokes another, unspoken association that all of his readers know: If the Scriptures are sound or *speech* of the Buddha, and Chan is *mind* then the Esoteric teaching must be the teaching of the *body*. This raises some interesting possibilities. For one thing, it recognizes the unique iconic mode of transmission and practice of the "Esoteric" teachings. For another, it foregrounds the dimension of performance. But what sort of performance? Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra, like Śubhākara-siṃha were noted thaumaturges and Zanning's biographies celebrate this dimension of their careers. But Vajrabodhi and especially Amoghavajra deployed ritual powers in the service of the State—something emphasized repeatedly in the "Yoga" school.[165] Here they differed from Śubhākara-siṃha, and this, I think, is the key issue for Zanning. The role of the practice of the body—the "esoteric" teaching—*is to protect the body politic*.

Is there any evidence for this? Remember that Zanning's three-wheels scheme is based on that developed by Amoghavajra in *Instructions* which is his primary commentary on the *Scripture for Humane Kings* and the *homa* rituals that were the centerpiece of his "State Protection" Buddhism. Further, Zanning's statement concerning the many branches in the Yoga lineage after Huilang, "I wonder why so little effect has been shown," could be read either as a critique of the failure of Huilang's spiritual heirs dutifully to serve the State or of the State to appropriately employ them.

Thus, in this brilliant synthesis Zanning evokes the *tri-karma* hermeneutic, as well as its esoteric incarnation the body speech, and mind of the Buddhas or the "three esoterica" (*sanmi* 三密), while reducing the "Great Teaching of Yoga" to a cult of protection based on and transmitted by carefully guarded ritual somatics. In a fashion reminiscent of Wuyue syntheses,[166] each element plays a double role at once evoking a Chan reading and an Esoteric reading: The Scriptures/Mantras provide the manifest "exoteric" teachings or the "speech" of the Buddha, Chan is the heart/mind/samādhi of the Buddha, while the "Great Teaching of Yoga" literally em-bodies the Esoteric ritual protection/protectors of the Buddhas arrayed for the defense of the Dharma and the sovereign who upholds it.

Wheel of Teaching	Wheel of Teaching & Command	Wheel of Mind
Scriptures	"Yoga"	Chan
use sound	use secrets	use mind
speech	(body)	mind
(mantra)	(mudrā)	(samādhi)

Implied but unstated "entailments" are indicated by parentheses. Other entailments

[165] See the accounts in Chou, "Tantrism" and Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom.*

[166] Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati* delineates the synthetic quality of Chan in the Wuyue region from whence Zanning hailed. See especially 118-126, and 149-158.

include the association of the scriptures with other schools of Buddhism ("Teachings"), as well as with the work of translation. The unspoken rejoinder to the phrase "use mind to transmit mind" is, of course, "and not set up the scriptures," something some later advocates of Chan would be quick to point out. But at the end of the tenth century the dominant position was arguably that taken by Zongmi that the mind and speech of the Buddha were inseparable, and therefore there was no question of overzealous "worship" of the latter. Further, Zanning's division of "Exoteric" and "Esoteric" is not primarily a sectarian one. It is a division based on function and mode of transmission, and all three—Exoteric, Esoteric, and Chan—have their role. Always one to find a way to bridge differences and accommodate all within the capacious teaching, Zanning is at pains to situate the "Yoga Teaching" of Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra in a comprehensive vision of Buddhism, just as he is at pains to situate Buddhism in an all-encompassing vision of the imperial culture (*wen* 文) that is bringing Buddhism to its most perfect expression.

Esoteric Buddhism: A Working Definition

A host of "preinterpretive decisions" have led scholars, both traditional and modern, to posit a sectarian "Esoteric School" in the Tang founded by Śubhākara-siṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra. Although all three transmitted recently available Tantras to China, there is no evidence that the three saw themselves as "school" and little to suggest that there was any contact between Śubhākara-siṃha and the latter two ācāryas.[167] Grouping the three together was an artifact of Shingon influenced scholarship. Zanning's treatment of the three indicates that he clearly knew the difference. The first context for the "Yoga" and for the "Wheel of Instruction and Command" was the Tang. Further, the "Yoga" of Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra is the "on the ground" taxonomy, and it was clearly one that had its inspiration outside of China. Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra regarded the teachings of the STTS as distinctive, and restricted access to it. They depict it as the most advanced Buddhist teaching available and actually describe these teachings as Vajrayāna. But the evidence from their writings suggests that they saw the "Yoga" not as an exclusive "sect" or "school" but as a special dispensation within the Mahāyāna.

It is also evident that the "Wheel of Instruction and Command" was a term coined in the Tang by Amoghavajra for his Chinese disciples and patrons. It describes a key feature of the *STTS* and his particular adaptation of it—the use of the *vidyārājas* in the cult of State protection. The rise to prominence of the *vidyārājas* has been cited by modern scholars as one of the distinguishing characteristics of Esoteric Buddhism, and Zanning noted this characteristic as well. While the notion of the "esoteric" played an especially prominent role in the transmission of the Yoga Teaching, the emphasis seems to have been on function rather than on doctrinal ideology. Although Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra do not appear to have

[167] Not to mention the fact that the careers of Bodhiruci 菩提流志 and Prajña 般若 bracketed those of the three *ācāryas* but they are never included in any "school."

advanced elaborate transmission lineages, some of Amoghavajra's disciples did, proclaiming their authority in language being used at the time to advance claims of authority in Chan. The context for the construction of the first lineages is the Tang, not the Song.

Thus it is clear that Zanning *was adapting pre-existent categories* and did not create them. Zanning's three-fold classification of Buddhism consisting of "Exoteric", "Esoteric," and "Mind" is an exegetical taxonomy based on the supposed method of transmission, rather than on some sort of exclusivist "school" claim. After all, Zanning was quite resistant to dismembering Buddhism into competing schools. His taxonomy needs to be viewed against the move by the first two Song emperors to make China the source of Buddhism through the translation of scriptures and the printing and distribution of the canon. Also important is Zanning's vision of the role of Buddhism as an integral and fully domesticated part of Chinese culture (*wen*). In this cultural economy each of the three parts of the Buddhist tradition had a function to perform, just as each of the three religions (*Ru*, Buddhism, Daoism) had a particular role to play. "Esoteric Buddhism's" function was protector of the State.

Finally, having examined the evidence, we must ask whether the term Esoteric Buddhism has any analytical utility. As a scholarly convention I think that "Esoteric Buddhism," is useful as long as we are careful *to spell out how we are using it and why*. The difficulties involved in using the term "Esoteric Buddhism" are, I think, fewer than those for the term "Tantra," especially with regard to China. But as McBride has pointed out, "Esoteric" is already part of a pre-existing network of meanings in Chinese Buddhist discourse and does not carry overt sectarian connotations until at least the Song. Nevertheless, as Griffith Foulk has noted, we would be fools to base our analytic categories solely on the condition that they appear in all cases in native lexicons with the meanings we would give them. This will never happen. What would we say if the question were transposed into the history of Chan? The term "*chan*" has a variety of unexceptional and non-sectarian uses throughout the Six Dynasties period. Problematizing the use of the term Chan has been salutary, but abandoning it altogether is not an option.[168]

Recent scholarly work on India and Tibet has become more consistent in its in assigning a particular milieu and distinctive features to the term "Esoteric Buddhism." These traditions are rooted in the texts that were spawned by medieval Indian sāmanta feudalism of the seventh and eighth centuries, as well as those texts associated with the later siddha movement of the ninth century and following.[169] In the first case we find as a dominant organizing trope the notion of the *rājādhirāja* (supreme overlord), while in the second the trope of the body and the antinomian behavior of the siddha takes precedence. Although based upon the Mahāyāna, Esoteric Buddhism is distinct from it, though even the most "sectarian" of these movements seldom repudiate the Mahāyāna. Esoteric Buddhism puts forward a coherent ritual and ideological program with a distinctive polity and pantheon (*vidyārājas*). Like the Mahāyāna and other new religious movements, its proponents often portray their teachings both as "new" and as "old," specifically as being the "secret" or deeper truth of the Mahāyāna

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[168] McRae makes the point that all of these "early Chan" groupings are part of the Chan "school" only retrospectively in *Seeing Through Zen*, especially 14-17.

[169] For the siddha texts see Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, chapters five to seven.

and of the "teaching of all of the Buddhas."

In the case of Esoteric Buddhism, we can see that in South Asia these texts were accompanied by definite cultic, material, and sociological markers. Access to the ritual knowledge was through initiation (*abhiṣeka*) by a teacher (ācārya) with claims to authority legitimated through lineage transmissions. The ritual knowledge and the material culture of the system were structured by the mandalic system presented in the texts (five *kula* or Buddha families, etc.).[170] As I see it, making distinctions such as these helps us think about the ways ideas and practices change and are reconfigured over time. They also help us to think about how the ideas, practices, and material artifacts from one culture are taken up by and transformed by another culture. Obviously our analytical construct fits some features and historical moments better than others, and obviously it meshes with some aspects of indigenous taxonomies better than others. Although any search for a "true" or "perfect" taxonomy is doomed to fail, our deployment of taxonomies is part of a dialectic in which we engage and make sense of the world we study *and tease out those elements that change*.

As I look at what became of the texts and practices of Esoteric Buddhism when they were imported to China I see three analytically distinct kinds of phenomena:

1. In the "Great Teaching of Yoga" promoted by Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra we encounter the full range of cultic, material, and sociological attributes mentioned above—access to the teachings through progressively restricted *abhiṣeka* and so forth—clearly based on a South Asian template, in this case the STTS. Despite his sticking close to the South Asian "program" Amoghavajra in particular can be cited for a quite range of adaptations—from the revamping of Chinese apocrypha like the *Scripture for Humane Kings* to innovations in language such as the "wheel-body" scheme.[171]

2. Adaptation, appropriation and transformation are the overriding realities, and once in circulation in a culture, texts and practices are adapted and combined under the sway of the indigenous cultural logic and institutions. While the Chinese origin of the well known "dual mandala" system articulated by Kūkai remains speculative at best, there are other distinctively Chinese developments including the use of the *Susiddhimahākara-tantra* to integrate the *Mahāvairocana sūtra* and the STTS and the production of a host of ritual manuals during the ninth century that are firm witness to Chinese innovation. These systems center on *abhiṣeka*, *homa*, etc., as do South Asian Esoteric systems, but the specific deployment of ritual elements and deities is indigenous to China.

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[170] While traditional Buddhist exegetes (Amoghavajra or Kūkai, for example) have often pointed to mantras, *dhāraṇīs*, and *paritta* in the Mahāyāna and the Nikāya schools as evidence of the primordial existence of Esoteric Buddhism, we as historians must distinguish between forms of Buddhism directly based on the Tantras of the seventh century and following, and the ubiquitous application of spells in South Asian religion. These are not "proto-Tantric" or "proto-Esoteric. They belong rather to the more general category of spells that Robert Gimello has aptly called the "Buddhist occult."

[171] They provided manuals to apply the technology of the Yoga to expedite earlier ritual traditions such as the those of the *Amitāyur dhyāna sūtra*, and the *Yulanpen sūtra* (this last resulting in the creation of a new ritual for the aid of "hungry ghosts," the "Release of the Flaming Mouths" (*fang yankou* 放焰口).

3. Texts, icons, ritual elements, hermeneutical approaches, and so forth that were part of coherent Esoteric systems in South Asia were, as often as not, disassembled in East Asia, and their elements incorporated into already established intellectual and ritual systems, predominantly those of the Huayan and Chan varieties. In these cases I prefer to avoid designating them "Esoteric." Rather we are tracing the impact of the texts and practices of Esoteric Buddhism *in other systems*. One very well known example is the employment of "Yoga monks" (*yuqie seng* 瑜伽僧) in the rituals for "Release of the Flaming Mouths" (*fang yankou* 放焔口). This ritual became one of the most frequently practiced in China, was a major source of monastic income, was performed by Buddhists of all stripes and even was emulated in Daoism.[172] Another example of the assimilation of Esoteric Buddhism may be seen in the grotto at Baoding shan with its distinctive synthesis of Huayan, Esoteric, and more popular iconography.[173] The incorporation of such new elements is not evidence for "syncretism." Rather, it is witness to a common practice whereby religious traditions constantly update and renovate their vocabulary and practices to suit the changing world of their adherents.[174] Such phenomena, inspired by "the idea of the Esoteric," has had an enormous impact in Chinese religious life, and we are only now beginning to trace its outlines.

Abbreviations

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, *et al.* 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai 大正一切經刊刻會, 1924-32. Taishō number is listed first followed by volume number, page, register (a, b, c), and when appropriate, line number.

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[172] For an overview and bibliography on these rituals see Orzech, "*Fang yankou* and *pudu*: Translation, Metaphor, and Religious Identity." 213-234, and the recent dissertation by Hun Y. Lye, Feeding Ghosts : A Study of the *Yuqie Yankou* Rite.

[173] The Baoding shan complex was in part inspired by the late Tang "Esoteric" master Liu Benzun, but I don't think we can label this Southern Song complex "Esoteric."

[174] Stewart presents an alternative to the common model of syncretism in "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory," 260-287.

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